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Dark Mirrors and Disembodied Spirits

Gender, Sexuality and Incest in Selected Fiction by Daphne du Maurier

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This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Abstract

Daphne du Maurier has long been considered chiefly as a writer of popular fiction. She is celebrated as a masterful constructor of plot and acclaimed for her ability to infuse novelistic narrative with a nameless and pervasive frisson of unease, but it is only recently that critics have begun seriously to investigate the shadowy complexities of her widely-read novels. In this thesis, three of du Maurier's best-known works—*Jamaica Inn*, *Rebecca* and *My Cousin Rachel*—are examined using psychoanalytic theory and close textual analysis together with autobiographical information. Each novel reveals an informing concern with the stability of identity, and the psychological perils by which the self is both shaped and haunted. In my discussion of *Jamaica Inn*, Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection elucidates Mary Yellan's confinement within the rigid boundaries of a violently imposed gender role, and her dangerous quest to transgress these limits. In the case of *Rebecca*, Nancy Chodorow's version of the female Oedipus complex illuminates the bisexual triangle in which du Maurier's nameless heroine finds herself trapped at Manderley, and brings into focus the anxiety which haunts her in her pursuit of maturity. Finally, in the chapter on *My Cousin Rachel* Jean Baudrillard's work on seduction and Gilles Deleuze's account of masochism help to explain Philip's compulsion to rid himself of his wealth, his land and the house in which he grew up, so that he might live like a servant with his cousin's maternal and alluring widow. In my reading of each of these novels, analysis uncovers a preoccupation with varying combinations of gender, sexuality and incest, a trinity of issues which beset the author in her own life, and which, in her fiction, inflect the protagonists' quest towards or away from a coherent identity. In conclusion it will be suggested that du Maurier's narratives are written with a double-edged pen: at once widely read, popular fiction, and darkly psychological, subvertive literature, in which deep-rooted social and cultural boundaries are destabilized.

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Introduction

In his 1984 address entitled “The Koine of Myth,” Northrop Frye describes narrative as “a kind of garment woven over a far more primitive and naked vision.”¹ All literature that “become[s] a significant part of human consciousness,” he proposes, has for a skeleton some ancient and prevalent story from which it derives its power.² Reappearing time and again beneath the guise of many and varying “woven garments,” this “mythical structure”³ resonates widely; striking at deep-seated cultural chords, and is partially responsible for the far-reaching popularity of that literature Frye describes, in *Anatomy of Criticism*, as “romantic.”⁴ Critics have long considered Daphne du Maurier a member of this particular literary family, a classification she herself abhorred and resisted,⁵ and one which reviewers of her work have only recently begun to relinquish. Indeed the majority of her novels do not, upon examination, display those definitive features of the romance narrative to which Janice Radway draws attention in her formative book on the subject. Du Maurier’s prose is not, for example, “dominated by cliché,” nor is it characterised chiefly by “simple vocabulary”⁶ and, perhaps most compelling, the genre’s requisite “happy ending”⁷ is disfigured in her hands, tempered always by threat and unease. In short, her narratives are not romantic in the sense intended by those who dismissed *Rebecca* as “just a novelette.”⁸ However, if we return to *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye’s discussion remains pertinent. He uses the term, not to refer to that ‘pulp fiction’ of the kind proliferated by the likes of Barbara Cartland, but rather to denote a particular combination of “primitive formula”⁹ with the representation of a relatively recognisable reality. “The general tendency we have called romantic,” he argues, “suggest[s] implied mythical patterns in a world more closely associated with human experience.”¹⁰ The romantic narrative is thus a story that novelistically renders another, more archaic tale, the

¹ Northrop Frye, “The Koine of Myth: Myth as a Universally Intelligible Language,” *Myth and Metaphor*, ed. Robert D. Denham (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1991) 10.

² Frye, 17.

³ Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973) 136.

⁴ Frye, 139.

⁵ Sue Zlosnik & Avril Homer, “Cornish Gothic,” *Daphne du Maurier: Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination* (London: MacMillan Ltd, 199) 67

⁶ Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance* (London: Verso, 1987) 189.

⁷ Radway, 66.

⁸ Sally Beaman, Afterword to *Rebecca* (London: Virago Press, 2007) 431.

⁹ Frye, 17.

¹⁰ Frye, 139.

shape of which becomes discernable upon close examination, and in *this* sense, the definition is particularly illuminating applied to du Maurier's work.

The "primitive formula[e]" which structure the novels I shall go on to analyse here, are all concerned with the same issue. Each "naked vision" over which du Maurier weaves the fabric of her narrative tells a story about *identity*, its formation, and the perils by which it is both shaped and haunted. Her fiction thus reflects an interest in the concept of self which she entertained throughout her life, and which is evident chiefly in the constant scrutiny to which she subjected her own famously complex character. There were, Margaret Forster writes in her biography, "tremendous contradictions in [du Maurier's]...personality,"¹¹ and of these she was always acutely aware. Perhaps most significant among them is the author's profoundly ambiguous gendering which she summarises epigrammatically, referring to herself as "the boy in the box." "She had seen herself as something other," Forster says, "a half breed, someone internally male and externally female."¹² Du Maurier's affinity with things masculine, at its strongest an active longing to have been born a boy, extends back into early childhood and is fundamentally linked, Forster argues, to sentiments articulated by her father, Gerald du Maurier, with whom she shared an unusually intense connection.

She wished often that she was a boy... because she and her sisters were well aware of how passionately their father had longed for a son....All three daughters wished their beloved father could have a son to make him happy, and Daphne wished it most of all.¹³

Her masculine qualities might thus be attributed to a powerful bond with her father, along with her capacity to "imagine herself as the boy he had been" and the son for which he so yearned.¹⁴ Du Maurier frequently contemplated the profound ambiguity by which this deeply significant relationship with her father was characterised, and in a 1969 interview with Wilfred De'Ath, articulated some frank opinions concerning the influence of close familial ties on adult romance. "She had told him," Forster writes, "she thought people looked for partners who 'resemble their family...the boy looks for someone like his mother or sister...the girl for someone like her father or brother...the whole thing is incestuous.'"¹⁵ This philosophy, together with a founding belief that "not being able to give free rein to incestuous

¹¹ Margaret Forster, *Daphne du Maurier*, (London: Arrow, 1994) 278.

¹² Forster, 222.

¹³ Forster, 12.

¹⁴ Forster, 12.

¹⁵ Forster, 378.

feeling was some kind of tragedy,”¹⁶ is visible also in the very bones of her narratives. “Convinced,” Nina Auerbach writes, “that like the good Freudian daughter she harboured incestuous longings, Daphne du Maurier wove incest into her fiction.”¹⁷ The triangular patterns that inform *Rebecca* and *My Cousin Rachel*, for instance, reveal an oedipal quality to their particular scaffoldings which reflects both the author’s interest in incest, and her fascination with the formation of identity. Described by du Maurier herself as above all a “psychological”¹⁸ narrative, *Rebecca* is as much the story of infantile progress, common, Nancy Chodorow argues, to all Western female children, as it is the tale of a jealous wife, set in a recognisable society. It novelistically develops the situation of a young, bourgeois woman in a difficult marriage, and simultaneously catalogues a girl’s navigation of the obstacle-strewn path towards independent selfhood. In this way, du Maurier aptly demonstrates Frye’s “romantic tendency,” overlaying the framework of an originally Freudian *mythos* or pattern, with a story characterised by a degree of naturalism. The same strategy is evident in *My Cousin Rachel*, but here the tale of Philip’s seduction and consequent fall from power exhibits a Deleuzian masochistic inflection, charting his wilfully *regressive* course back through oedipal territory to an earlier condition in which a separate identity did not yet exist. As Philip gets sicker, inching towards insanity and death, so he loses control of this dangerous reversion and begins to disappear, his life story becoming gradually more indistinguishable from Ambrose’s. This alarming state of (non) being, wherein there is no discrete self, haunts each narrative persistently, reminding the protagonists of the precarious fragility of identity and the ease with which it might be upset and dismantled. In each of the novels with which this study is concerned, du Maurier includes a moment emblematic of precisely this kind of threat. At some point, each of the protagonists stands before a mirror and gaze upon an unfamiliar face. In *Rebecca* the timid and youthful heroine transforms herself unwittingly into her older, more beautiful predecessor so that staring into the glass she is confronted by a “self that [is] not [her] at all.”¹⁹ *Jamaica Inn*’s Mary Yellan similarly finds herself before a “tell-tale” looking glass, which is “spotted [and] cracked,” but which reveals, nevertheless, a growing likeness to the hopelessly down-trodden Aunt Patience, desperate specimen of subservient femininity.²⁰ Finally Philip, juvenile

¹⁶ Forster, 378.

¹⁷ Nina Auerbach, *Daphne du Maurier: Haunted Heiress* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000) 48.

¹⁸ Beauman, 430.

¹⁹ Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca* (London: Virago, 2007) 238, all further references made in-text to this edition.

²⁰ Daphne du Maurier, *Jamaica Inn* (London: Pan Books, 1983) 120, all further references made in-text to this edition.

narrator of *My Cousin Rachel*, catches a glimpse of his reflection following the disastrous and violent second proposal to his Italian cousin. “Surely it was Ambrose who stood there,” he asks, “with the sweat upon his forehead, the face drained of all colour?”²¹

In each of these instances, du Maurier’s protagonists are confronted by strangely distorted and unfamiliar versions of themselves, and are thus forced to ask the question, formulated by Eugenia Delamotte, “What distinguishes me from not-me? Where, if they exist at all, are the boundaries of the self?”²² This anxiety over the stability of identity, Delamotte argues, is the hinge upon which Gothic narrative turns.²³ “Gothicism,” she writes, is “fundamentally concerned with the...dividing line between the world and the individual soul.”²⁴ The sense of fear, suspense and peculiar unease by which this genre is popularly identified, derives chiefly from its preoccupation with the frailty and necessity of borders, most significant among which is the one that separates self from other. *Jamaica Inn*, in which the plot unfolds against a wasted landscape resonant of such sinister texts as *Macbeth* and *Wuthering Heights*, is arguably du Maurier’s most explicitly Gothic novel, and renders this concern with distinguishing boundaries quite overt. The law—metaphorical limit dividing right from wrong—is central to the narrative, repeatedly highlighted by Joss’s violent transgression and Mary’s desire to enforce legal justice. Action in the story is thus fundamentally concerned on the one hand with the destruction of a significant borderline, and on the other with its restoration. In this way the plot replicates on a larger scale that intimate battle Delamotte has identified as quintessentially Gothic, in which Mary fights to maintain unbroken the boundaries enclosing her self. She is threatened both with physical penetration in the form of rape, and significantly, with psychic dissolution of the kind suggested in those alarming mirror scenarios. The Vicar of Altarnun, strange ambiguous “freak of nature” (*Jl*, 91) threatens, at the novel’s climactic moment, to destroy what Delamotte, writing of the Gothic in general, has termed the “last barrier protecting self from other”²⁵ so that Mary, unable to discern her own limits, will be forced to surrender her identity to him. Atop Roughtor she articulates a fear of precisely this kind of dissolution, acknowledging that “soon she must lose

²¹ Daphne du Maurier, *My Cousin Rachel* (London: Virago, 2007) 271, all further references made in-text to this edition.

²² Eugenia Delamotte, *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth Century Gothic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 23.

²³ My discussions of the Gothic in this thesis take their cue from Delamotte, and also Jerrold Hogle, both of whom suggest the genre is concerned chiefly with the disruption of boundaries, most crucially those defining identity and the self.

²⁴ Delamotte, 23.

²⁵ Delamotte, 21.

herself and merge into [Davey's] shadow" (*Jl*, 253). Thus, *Jamaica Inn* attests to Delamotte's thesis. In du Maurier's fictional world, as "in the world of Gothic romance, the physical and metaphorical boundaries that one ordinarily depends on, prove unstable, elusive, ineffective, nonexistent," causing her protagonists ultimately to face "the fear of unity with some terrible other."²⁶

In her book *Powers of Horror* Bulgarian-born French philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva theorises this link between the destruction of borderlines, and the profound dread we might term Gothic unease. The collapse of any rigid division, the stability of which we trust under normal circumstances, serves viscerally to remind us, Kristeva proposes, of primary immersion in a world characterised by homogeneity and continuity, an archaic condition which predates the start of the oedipal journey, and in which we were still a part of the maternal body. This early state of imagined unity with the mother, defined by the blurring of boundaries, is experienced in terms of an equally fused duality of desire and fear, such that it becomes, in Kristeva's words "a vortex of summons and repulsion:" attractive because it promises to restore a sense of blissful oneness, and repellent because the cost of such original pleasure is total loss of subjectivity and, effectively, death.²⁷ Thus the child is beset by profoundly contradictory yearnings: it both wants to unite with the mother, restoring the seamless continuity of the womb, and tear itself viciously away from her and the threat of engulfment she represents. It is this shifting quagmire of inconsistent longings from which the infant extricates itself, taking its first step on the firmer path to independent identity, a process that amounts to drawing a line between itself and its mother—a process Kristeva names abjection.

Within our own personal archaeology, [abjection is] our earliest attempts to release the hold of the *maternal* entity even before ex-isting outside of her....It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling.²⁸

The child achieves this inaugural differentiation in a vehement rejection of the deeply seductive maternal, whereby she ceases to be a part of the infant and her familiarity becomes suddenly infused with an alien quality, suddenly *abject*. Unlike Freudian repression, Kristeva's abjection is an unending procedure, in which we "ceaselessly

²⁶ Delamotte, 22.

²⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 1.

²⁸ Kristeva, 13.

confront...otherness,”²⁹ and so constantly reconfirm, and shore up the boundaries of the self. That strange, primal state, from which all divisions are lacking, inflected with its nauseous combination of attraction and repulsion, never disappears. Rather it returns, again and again, confronting us beneath the guise of something superficially repellent and unfamiliar—in Kristeva’s own words, “a monster”³⁰—but which ultimately reveals all the ambiguity of that original condition. Constructed from elements with which we identify on the one hand, and which we reject on the other, this “inassimilable alien”³¹ recalls abjection’s first maternal candidate and thus “simultaneously beseeches and pulverises the subject,”³² “beckons to us, and ends up engulfing us.”³³ In this way the abject forces us to repeat the “jettison[ing]” and “radical exclus[ion]”³⁴ first performed at the moment of initial separation, and so, in Kristeva’s words, “preserves the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be.”³⁵

Thus, fundamentally, and in the words of Jerrold Hogle, “the Gothic is...about the connection of abject monster figures with the primal and engulfing morass of the maternal.”³⁶ Nowhere does Mary come closer to non-identity than in that climactic scenario, played out on a black, mist-swathed mountain, in which she is isolated with the “ghostly” (*Jl*, 86) Vicar of Altarnun. In *Rebecca* and *My Cousin Rachel*, this link between monster and mother is rendered even more explicit. Both eponymous female characters occupy maternal roles in virtue of the oedipal shape of their narratives, and similarly both generate the sense of fearful ambiguity, characteristic of the abject, which “disturbs identity”³⁷ and marks the novels as Gothic. Rebecca’s legacy at Manderley, so venerated for its good taste and charm, also includes a grotesque housekeeper who daily worships the dead mistress in her perfectly preserved bed chamber, and a decaying, ruinous beach house, the dark, cobwebby centre of extra-marital sin. The first Mrs de Winter thus overtly attracts and frightens the insecure heroine, who, in her attempts to replicate her formidable predecessor’s sophisticated character, gradually surrenders her own identity. The overtly maternal Rachel, whose Florentine roots subtly

²⁹ Kristeva, 6.

³⁰ Kristeva, 11.

³¹ Kristeva, 11.

³² Kristeva, 5.

³³ Kristeva, 4.

³⁴ Kristeva, 2.

³⁵ Kristeva, 10.

³⁶ Jerrold Hogle, “Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture,” *Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 10.

³⁷ Kristeva, 4.

recall that canonical work of Gothic fiction, Anne Radcliffe's *The Italian*, emerges as an abject presence at the narrative's close (which is also its opening passages). Having killed his cousin to avenge a crime for which there is no conclusive evidence, Philip is haunted by doubt that causes him repeatedly to question the nature of his own identity. If Rachel is innocent, then he must despair and count himself among the most heinous of criminals, murderer of a friend, a lover, even a mother. This grisly uncertainty plagues him in visions of another woman-killer, whose body he saw hanging from a gibbet during childhood, and with whom he might now have to admit he shares an ugly symmetry.

Tom Jenkyn, battered specimen of humanity, unrecognisable and unlamented, did you all those years ago, stare after me in pity as I went running down the woods into the future? Had I looked back at you, over my shoulder, I should not have seen you swinging in your chains but my own shadow. (*MCR*, 7)

Philip's uneasy inability clearly to differentiate between the killer and himself, already evidence for the subliminal presence of the abject mother, is echoed and amplified by the basic human horror experienced upon confrontation with a corpse. The dead body, Kristeva argues, "is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life."³⁸ That terrifying original condition, in which the potentials of living and dying nestle together, thus crystallises in cold human remains. Tom Jenkyn, with his unpleasantly familiar pulpy limbs and blackened body, harbours the maternal quagmire. The horror of Philip's identification with a murderer becomes the horror of identification with a corpse, which in turn heralds an awful return to the mother's body. Once again du Maurier demonstrates the Gothic propensity to link the monstrous with the maternal origin, and develops her own anxieties concerning the nature of the self to horrific effect.

The issues which shape this selection of du Maurier's narratives—primarily incest, gender and sexuality—are all subjects which, it may be argued, develop in some way from the author's own life experience. Her intense relationship with her father, her profound ambivalence towards her own femaleness and her deeply complex sexuality emerge beneath different guises in her fiction as obstacles to be negotiated on the way towards, or back from, the shaping of a mature identity. Thus, there is a sense in which du Maurier's peculiar obsessions inform her work; however, her writing develops these preoccupations in such a way that they resonate widely. Her narratives revolve around forbidden or frustrated desire,

³⁸ Kristeva, 4.

fear and crippling anxiety, corollaries of her particular constellation of interests, and so speak to far-reaching human experience—to which her persistent popularity attests. In her treatment of these concerns du Maurier also reiterates, often with surprising transparency, psychoanalytic formulae delineating the uneasy establishment of female heterosexuality, the formation and transgression of the incest taboo, and, most basic and pervasive of all, the forging of the individual self. No doubt loosely informed by her knowledge both of Freud and Jung,³⁹ forefathers of modern psychoanalytic theory, these patterns reveal the primal roots of everyday sensations that beset characters: jealousy, for example, insecurity and dissatisfaction. Thus they lend to du Maurier's narratives a sense of deep cohesion redolent of Frye's "naked vision," the smooth solidity of which is visible beneath the tangled details of plot, and of those familiar and conscious emotional problems, generating a resonance and a sense of profundity we might justly term mythic.

³⁹ Zlosnik & Horner, 7.

Abject Beginnings: Confinement and Chaos in *Jamaica Inn*

On writing the savage *Jamaica Inn*, Forster reports in her biography, du Maurier set out “to delineate the unevenness of the relationship between the sexes” and to investigate the roles, reproduced time and again throughout the history of the Gothic genre, of “the man as brute and the woman as victim.”⁴⁰ Notably, the novel is more direct in its treatment of sexuality and gender than the author’s more complex later work, where these issues tend to be mystified, evasive and slippery. *Jamaica Inn*, on the other hand, captures, with a sense of raw immediacy, all the misogynistic violence it sets out to describe, and which is inherent, Mary Yellan finds, in patriarchal rule.⁴¹ Du Maurier’s bold protagonist inherits from her young creator a strong if ambiguous character and a profound abhorrence for the narrow, culturally-defined identities to which society has traditionally relegated women. From the very beginning of her story, the author locates the unfortunate Mary within a gender hierarchy of precisely this kind, in which she is forced to comply with a pre-defined female role, and which she plans from the outset to dismantle. In pursuit of a more authentic identity, one which can accommodate the “masculine” qualities that contribute to the complexities and multiplicities inherent in her own character, Mary crosses the boundaries laid out for her at Jamaica Inn, and as she does this finds herself inching closer to violence, danger and death at lawless male hands. Indeed border-breaking has, she discovers, a perilous domino effect. The destruction of one leads to the destabilisation of others, and eventually she finds herself clinging to that last barrier, fighting to preserve the fragile skin which holds her subjectivity together and defines her individual self. Du Maurier’s literary probing of the boundary separating male from female, a divide invested with so much personal significance, gives way ultimately to the fear, central in Gothic narrative and succinctly articulated by Jerrold Hogle, that “something like a return to the confusion and loss of identity of being half inside and half outside the mother...may await us behind any old foundation...on which we try, by breaking it up, to build a brave new world.”⁴²

⁴⁰ Margaret Forster, *Daphne du Maurier*. (London: Arrow, 1994) 120-1.

⁴¹ Daphne du Maurier, *Jamaica Inn* (London: Pan Books, 1983) all further references made in-text to this edition

⁴² Jerrold Hogle, “Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture,” *Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 5.

After her father's death and before her life at Jamaica Inn begins, Mary lives alone with her mother and does the work of a farm labourer more typically reserved for young men. This unconventional early training instills in her a great deal of courage and a "certain deep-grained common sense," (37) which leads other characters frequently to remark that she "ought to have [been] made... a boy" (115). Indeed, Mary is much of this opinion herself, and throughout the novel we see her low estimation of her own sex reiterated. "Why were women such fools?" (64) she demands, deeply frustrated, and later, with a sense of gloomy detachment, refers to "them" as "frail things of straw" (139). Unwilling to term herself either foolish or fragile, she attempts to ignore her own femaleness and plans to forge ahead with her existence as if she were male. "[Mary] would never marry,' we learn, "it was a long while since she had decided that. She would save money in some way and do a man's work on a farm" (122). It is thus her ambition to live as her widowed mother had done: self-sufficiently, independent of men and unfettered by socially defined constraints on her gender. When she moves to Jamaica Inn, however, this plan is quickly arrested. At work within its walls Mary finds a horrendously exaggerated gender hierarchy. Joss Merlyn introduces his niece into his little kingdom, bellowing the words "I am the master in this house....You'll do as you're told" (23). To this statement her Aunt Patience duly attests, both with her alarming, haunted appearance, and her demeanor "like a whimpering dog...trained by constant cruelty to implicit obedience" (20). It is, first and foremost, her Uncle's physical size and hyperbolic masculine strength which renders his power structure so effective, and which sets him unequivocally at its summit. Joss is, in the words of Nina Auerbach, a "giant...animalistic caricature of male violence,"⁴³ a description the accuracy of which becomes clear upon considering du Maurier's initial portrayal of her Heathcliffian villain. She dehumanises him, adding layer upon layer of bestial imagery, such that the depiction itself echoes, in its excessiveness, his surfeit of male might.

He was a great husk of man, nearly seven feet high....He looked as if he had the strength of a horse, with immense powerful shoulders, long arms that reached almost to his knees and large fists like hams. His frame was so big that in a sense his head was dwarfed, and sunk beneath his shoulders, giving that half-stooping impression of a giant gorilla....(18)

Joss is thus a pastiche of brutish characteristics. He is primitive, animal force, hardly credited with humanity (his small head suggests a rational deficit) and we become aware that in this grim and savage world, to which Mary has reluctantly travelled, there exists an archaic

⁴³ Nina Auerbach, *Daphne du Maurier: Haunted Heiress* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 117.

relationship between dominance and physical weight. Indeed, her uncle throws his considerable bulk behind every command he issues: “Go up to bed Mary,” he orders her, all authority, “or I’ll wring your neck” (26). And moments later: “Now get out...I’ll break every bone in your body” (27). Joss’s hierarchy, founded on the unequal distribution of strength across the sexes, is thus a vicious and brutally reductive system of power, in which all the complexities of self are denied in favour of simple, inescapable anatomical fact. As she watches the wagons roll into the courtyard of the Inn, this reality dawns for Mary.

Here she was on her bed, a girl of three and twenty, in a petticoat and a shawl, with no weapons...to oppose a fellow twice her age and eight times her strength who, if he realised she had watched the scene tonight from her window, would encircle her neck with his hand, and, pressing lightly with his finger and thumb, would put an end to her questioning. (49)

Beneath the threat of bodily harm—which already forces her into a frustrating and uncomfortably submissive role—there simmers another, more profound and disruptive danger, one that renders those physiological differences, in terms of which Joss’s crude system works, stark and indubitable to an even greater extent. The potential of sexual violence is an ever-present possibility for Mary, and one that is latent in every threat her uncle makes. “I’ll break you,” he snarls, a deeply ambiguous statement, “until you eat out of my hand like your aunt yonder” (23). Later this tacit suggestion of rape, and its supreme conquering power, becomes overt: “Why, poor, weak thing,” Joss says to his niece, “you know as well as I do I could’ve had you your first week at Jamaica Inn...You’re a woman after all. Yes, by heaven, and you’d be lying at my feet now, like your Aunt Patience, crushed” (175). In “Polemical Preface,” the introduction to her book, *The Sadeian Woman*, Angela Carter refers to rape as “a kind of physical graffiti”⁴⁴ in which, she writes, man and woman are “reduced to [their] formal elements...the probe and the fringed hole.”⁴⁵

[The penis] asserts. The hole is open, an inert space.... From this elementary iconography may be derived the whole metaphysic of sexual differences—man aspires; woman has no other function but to exist, waiting. The male is positive, an exclamation mark. Woman is negative. Between her legs lies nothing but zero, the sign for nothing....⁴⁶

Joss’s threats of violation, entwined with and often inseparable from those of physical domination, aim to render incontrovertible the principles of masculine strength and innate feminine weakness on which his gender hierarchy is built. The rape act demonstrates in

⁴⁴ Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (London: Virago, 1979) 6.

⁴⁵ Carter, 4.

⁴⁶ Carter, 4.

concrete terms what Carter calls “the *reductio ad absurdum* of bodily differences between men and women.”⁴⁷ “It extracts all evidence of me from myself,” she writes, “and leaves behind only a single aspect of my life as a mammal. It enlarges this aspect [until]....my symbolic value is primarily that of...receptivity, a dumb mouth from which the teeth have been pulled.”⁴⁸ The rapist, in short, treats his female victim as if those characteristics by which her genitalia are defined—passivity, inertia and receptivity, as Carter has suggested—extend to and saturate every element of her person. She is there to be used, a still, silent and yielding object. The act of violation distils and savagely enforces the crudest of patriarchal value systems, in which masculinity is aligned with agency and power, and femininity with inactivity and ineluctable vulnerability. In this way the threat of sexual domination, always uncomfortably present at Jamaica Inn, promises to transform Mary into a version of her quivering, subservient aunt, an outcome the certainty of which Joss has explicitly articulated. Indeed, Auerbach suggests that “as a portrait of Mary’s own metamorphosis under Joss’s control, Patience’s terror is more frightening than Joss’s rages.”⁴⁹ Thus, hemmed in by the twin prospects of broken bones and broken virtue, Mary, it seems, has little choice but to “do as [she is] told,” and play the dreary part of female servility to which her uncle has assigned her.

It is a requirement of this position that she “serve [Joss’s] customers” (23) on nights when the Inn is open for business, so, on her first Saturday at Jamaica, Mary finds herself in the hot, close interior of the bar, surrounded by the local low-life. Among this corrupt crowd, she identifies “poachers, thieves [and] cattle stealers,” and we learn that each man’s lawless degradation is reflected in his unsavoury exterior: “They were dirty for the most part,” Mary observes, “ragged, ill-kept, with matted hair and broken nails” (41). Indeed, the drinking rabble become almost monstrous as their depraved revelry climaxes, and they begin to blur and stretch, appearing “shapeless and distorted, all hair and teeth, their mouths much too big for their bodies” (42). In *Powers of Horror*, Zlosnik and Horner remind us, Kristeva writes that “any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject.”⁵⁰ The queasy sense of revulsion Mary experiences, confronted with Jamaica’s unwholesome clientele, reveals that this is something she discovers first-hand. “She felt a physical disgust rise up in her,” (41) which, in terms of Kristeva’s thesis, indicates a violent rejection of Joss’s “riotous,

⁴⁷ Carter, 4.

⁴⁸ Carter, 4-5.

⁴⁹ Auerbach, 133.

⁵⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 4.

crazy company” (43), and her desire radically to disconnect herself from them. Mary finally realises this separation when, having witnessed the horrific baiting of a “poor half-witted fellow” (41), she feels she can stand no more degeneracy and flees the bar, revolted. Du Maurier’s description of this man as he is taunted by the inn’s customers reproduces some of the bestial imagery previously used to illustrate Joss’s excessive strength and savage nature.

The pedlar was making bait of the wretched idiot from Dozmary, who, crazy from drink, had no control of himself, and could not rise from the floor where he squatted like an animal. They lifted him onto a table and the pedlar made him repeat the words to one of his songs...and the poor beast, excited by the applause that greeted him, jigged up and down on the table, whinnying delight, plucking at his spotted purple birthmark with a broken fingernail. Mary could bear it no longer. (43)

While it is the abused man whose grotesquely animal characteristics are persistently emphasised here, it is the brutality of the pedlar and his cronies which drives Mary from the room. Their cruelty and the absence of empathy which allows them to applaud and laugh at the misuse of one of their gang dehumanises the jeerers to a far greater extent than their unhappy prey. Their bestiality is later reiterated when the unfortunate victim, stripped of his clothes, is chased from the inn, “bleating like a sheep” (44) and followed by a horde of men who, in terms of this simile, become predatory pack. This lack of respect for the integrity of human life is re-enforced for Mary, when, as she leaves the bar, her uncle remarks that the threat of rape, so pervasive at Jamaica, is particularly imminent in the present circumstances, and compounded by the number of his company. “Because you’re my niece they’ve let you alone, my dear,” he tells her, “but if you hadn’t had that honour—by God there wouldn’t be much left of you now!” (43). In this way, the behaviour of the revellers, characterised as it is by cruelty and sexual indiscriminateness, repeats on a broader scale the landlord’s own vicious antics, by which, we have seen, he maintains control over the women in his household.

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud argues that the aggressive propensities towards violence and rape, clearly visible in Joss Merlyn and his associates, are built into human nature. However, they are more usually constrained by cultural values set up to prevent the dissolution of society through widespread murder and undiscerning sexual union. Culture, Freud proposes, “has to use its utmost efforts in order to set limits to man’s aggressive instincts and to hold the manifestations of them in check by psychical reaction formations.”⁵¹ Stripped of these fundamental laws, human beings regress to a kind of animal savagery,

⁵¹ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. Joan Riviere, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1973) 49.

acting on impulse with unmitigated ferocity and lust, killing and mating where and when they see fit. Freud's delineation of true human nature draws a ferocious picture:

The element of truth... is that men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result their neighbour is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him.⁵²

"Homo homini lupus,"⁵³ Freud writes in summation, or, "man is a wolf to his fellow man," a phrase which du Maurier echoes both in the chase scene at which I have looked, and, more explicitly, in her description of Mary's uncle. "The best things left to him were his teeth," the heroine observes, "when he smiled they...g[ave] him the lean and hungry appearance of a wolf. And though there should be a world of difference between the smile of a man and the bared fangs of a wolf, with Joss Merlyn they were one and the same" (18). Du Maurier's metaphor exposes the landlord and his patrons as Freud's "savage beasts," a comparison towards which their displays of cruelty and threats of sexual violation contribute.⁵⁴ The most significant and profoundly bestial aspect of Joss's character, of which all other instances of his animalism are arguably symptomatic, is revealed to Mary after she has crept down from her bed to eavesdrop on his underhanded dealings. She overhears him planning to hang one of his company and thus comes to understand that he and his men are engaged in the business of killing. The aggressive urge we have glimpsed primarily in the threat of rape, and later in the savage abuse of a "half-witted" boy, is properly put into action as Joss and his as-yet-unknown companion murder a reluctant wrecker in cold blood. This instance, more than any other, presents the landlord as the wolf to which du Maurier compares him. "He [is]," as Mary says, "a beast that walked by night" (122). As a murderer, Joss's character demonstrates the unequivocal triumph of animal urges over deeply ingrained, culturally constructed barricades designed specifically to inhibit them. He thus destabilises the social edifice, dissolving one of its foundational prohibitive laws, with the result that his violent and lecherous impulses meet little resistance and run wild. Mary's response to the information she has gained reminds us that in addition to naming all crimes abject, Kristeva also specifically identifies "those states where man strays on the territories of *animal*" as candidates for the

⁵² Freud, 48.

⁵³ Freud, 48.

⁵⁴ Freud, 49.

process of violent rejection.⁵⁵ Joss is horrifying, not simply in his transgression of legal barriers, but also because his actions effect a profoundly uneasy mingling of human with beast.

Mary felt her neck and her forehead go clammy with sweat, and her arms and legs were weighted suddenly, as though with lead. Little black specks flickered before her eyes, and with a growing sense of horror she realised that she was probably going to faint....Her knees were shaking now, and she knew that any moment they would give way beneath her. Already a surge of sickness rose inside her, and her head was swimming. (52)

Mary's physical reaction to her uncle's brutality echoes, quite precisely, the passages in *Powers of Horror* describing an encounter with the abject. Kristeva cites "spasms in the stomach," as symptomatic, along with perspiration of the forehead, and "sight-clouding dizziness"⁵⁶ which leads, in extreme cases, to the besieged subject "fall[ing] in a faint,"⁵⁷ thereby succumbing to the strange borderlessness that has pervaded waking life. With his crime, Joss demonstrates the permeability of deeply entrenched barriers and thus introduces into the world a sense of pre-social chaos, which, redolent of the undifferentiated womb, holds for Mary a "fatal fascination" (71), exuding a sickly magnetic pull that draws her from her bed in the middle of the night. The sweat her body discharges, and the urge to vomit that "r[ises] inside her," physically enact a frantic purging of this *attraction* to the site of the murder, which, if acted upon, will surely deliver her to her own death, to dissolution and nothingness. At the same time, the bodily expulsions reassuringly show Mary that the cardinal distinction between that which is a part of her and that which is not (sweat, vomit) remains effective. In this way, her skirmish with the abject ultimately reconfirms the all-important borders which hold together her subjectivity, so that in a moment she is "brought to herself" (52), fully conscious and alert once more. This is the purpose of abjection: rigorously to re-establish the presence of limits in a world where the border-blurring monstrous, harbinger of chaos, threatens to take over.

Mary's decision to inform against the landlord, product of her horrific encounter, replicates this reparation of intimate boundaries on a grander scale. "She was determined to have the better of her uncle," we learn, and to "expose him and his confederates to the law" (58). Thus she plans, by betraying him, to return the legal barriers Joss has broken to their intact state, and thereby also to restore the human-animal distinction which collapses in his murderous

⁵⁵ Kristeva, 12.

⁵⁶ Kristeva, 3.

⁵⁷ Kristeva, 4.

deed. In this way, Mary actively pursues a world in which there are ordering boundaries, solid, dependable and effective. However, at the same time, her decision to “proclaim his guilt” (80) constitutes the breaking of another, aggressively enforced law; one that Joss Merlyn himself has erected, and which, more than any other, is the limit by which Mary’s submissive role at Jamaica Inn is constrained and defined. The part her uncle requires her to play is predominantly one characterised by *silence*, a fact that becomes evident for the first time even before Mary has arrived at the inn. In the letter she receives from her aunt welcoming her to Jamaica, silence is stipulated as the most important condition of her stay. “I have asked your uncle,” Patience tells her, “and he does not object, he says, if you are quiet spoken and not a talker” (11). Joss himself reiterates this point upon meeting his niece with his ambiguous promise to “break” her, which is also a warning not to “open [her] mouth and squark” (23). In the following exchange, the same threat is repeated, this time accompanied and emphasised by a sample of the violence which underpins the landlord’s hierarchy:

Bending down to her ear and seizing her wrist, he doubled it behind her back until she cried out in pain. “Alright,” he said; “that’s like a foretaste of punishment, and you know what to expect. Keep your mouth shut and I’ll treat you like a lamb. (43)

Mary’s aunt, repeatedly broken by her husband’s savage brand of sexual oppression, has had this command to “keep her mouth shut” so deeply ingrained in the remains of her personality that, upon approaching a forbidden subject, she develops a kind of mutism, an *inability* to speak. “There’s bad things that happen at Jamaica Mary,” she warns her niece, “I can never tell you; I can’t even admit them to myself” (36). Patience, reduced through physical and sexual domination to the same silent passivity as her genitals, has become Carter’s “dumb mouth,” and it is clear that, at the Inn and under the brutal governance of its animalistic landlord, subservient femaleness is inextricably bound up with silence. Mary’s decision to betray her uncle and the secrets of his establishment thus becomes the violation of a law constraining gender. She intends, by disobeying Joss’s command, to overstep the limits of the narrow female identity he has prescribed, and in this sense, engages in the dismantling of a boundary, and effects a shift towards borderlessness.

Du Maurier infuses the walls of the lonely inn, within which Joss’s decree of silent passivity rules unequivocally, with all the oppressive menace we have come to associate with the landlord himself. The place is “evil,” Mary states, “When my uncle came to Jamaica Inn he must have cast his shadow over the good things, and they died” (220). The gloomy house, in which she finds herself caught with her aunt “like mice in a trap, unable to escape” (23), is to

a great extent a concrete representation of the rigidly restrictive part Joss's power system has forced her to play: its "damp walls" (220) hold her captive, suffocating her, as do the pre-defined limits of that subservient female role. In addition, the household routine in which Mary becomes immersed at Joss's behest, cleaning and washing as if she were the most domestic among women, forges an overt relationship between the inn and her identity. The Gothic prison, Eugenia Delamotte proposes, is horrific not only because of the "terrible villain" who governs it, but also because of the "the woman's work" its upkeep requires.⁵⁸ Mary's uncomfortably servile position is tied, in this way, to the sinister building whose floors she so regularly finds herself scrubbing. In this light, it is no surprise that the moors surrounding Jamaica Inn, "like an immense desert" (37), come to be connected with a sense of freedom, stifled as Mary is in the inn's dark interior by Joss's heavy hand.⁵⁹

One hill would be golden brown, while his neighbour still languished in the dark.It would be the glory of high noon to the east, with the moor as motionless as desert sand; and away westward arctic winter fell upon the hills, brought by a jagged cloud... that cast hail and snow and a sharp spittle rain on to the granite tor.... There was a challenge in the air that spurred Mary to adventure. (32)

On the open Cornish moors, boundaries as entrenched as the granite walls of Jamaica Inn become permeable to the extent that the landscape demonstrates at once a multitude of constantly shifting and conflicting characteristics: it is both light and dark, warm and cold, summer and winter, and, in this sense, the ideal setting for Mary's transgression of gender barriers. In a letter to Ellen Doubleday, du Maurier identifies her lonely Cornwall home as the site in which her own complex identity is allowed to drift towards gender hybridity. "She found Menabilly, and lived in it alone," she writes, referring to herself in the third person, "and let the phantom, who was neither boy nor girl, but disembodied spirit dance in the evening when there was no one to see."⁶⁰ Thus it is appropriate that Mary meets her chosen confessor, the one before whom she violates her uncle's law, surrounded by stretches of marshland and silent tors on Bodmin Moor, and similarly apt that he is initially described, in terms which overtly echo du Maurier's letter, as a "ghostly figure" (86). Indeed, the Vicar of Altarnun's albinism serves as a superficial indicator of the anomalies in his character, which run far deeper than his skin. As the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that he is not masculine in the same sense as the other male characters. Rather he crystallises the freedom

⁵⁸ Eugenia Delamotte, *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth Century Gothic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 205.

⁵⁹ Sue Zlosnik & Avril Horner, "Cornish Gothic," *Daphne du Maurier: Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination* (London: MacMillan, 1998) 74.

⁶⁰ Daphne du Maurier, letter to Ellen Doubleday, 1947 quoted in Forster, 222.

from gender towards which Mary, intent on breaking out from her prescribed female role, is travelling: he is, Zlosnik and Horner suggest, of hybrid sexuality, neither man nor woman, but *hermaphrodite*.⁶¹ He recalls the author's "disembodied spirit," and it is perhaps this similarity from which his spectral appearance, like "a shadow of a man" (129), derives, along with some of his disdain for the society in which he lives. Du Maurier convinced herself that her own internal phantom was above all not "sweet and good and kind," but rather "the person who dances alone...thumbing her nose at the world."⁶² Francis Davey's indeterminate gendering is repeatedly emphasised throughout the novel. We learn, for example, that though apparently a man, he is without "male aggression" (129). His voice too is "like the voice of a woman" (144) and he shows no masculine arousal when Mary, whose beauty is regularly reiterated, undresses in front of him, but simply stares at her "in cold indifference" (144). This absence of sexuality is rendered indubitable when, upon taking her out to the marshes, the Vicar tells his victim that he has "neither the mind nor the desire to touch [her]" (255). Thus, beneath his ghostly exterior, the very blank neutrality of which signals an asexuality, Davey is of profoundly composite construction, blurring the boundaries between genders just as the moor, from which he so suddenly emerges, dissolves those separating cold from warmth, summer from winter.

Seduced by this peculiar combination of male and female qualities, a blend which speaks to her own desire to move beyond the confines of her gender, Mary finds herself revealing to the Vicar all the secrets of Jamaica Inn. "His soft persuasive voice," later identified as quintessentially feminine and a mark of his hermaphroditic character, "would compel her to admit every secret her heart possessed" (92). Thus, at its bidding, and "scarcely aware of how it happened" (90) she destroys her uncle's law of silence, and so explodes the rigid limits of her predefined female identity. Unbeknownst to Mary, this betrayal of the landlord—this act of defiant gender transgression—impresses Davey, and causes him to single her out, in the narrative's final stages, as a kindred spirit, a potential companion. "You have proved yourself a dangerous opponent," he tells her, referring to the war she has successfully waged against Joss the patriarch, "I prefer you by my side" (254). During this scenario, in which the Vicar reveals himself as both her uncle's murderer and the mastermind behind the wrecking exploits, it becomes gradually clearer that a destabilisation of the gender binary—of the kind in which Mary herself has engaged—cannot take effect in isolation, but must result in the

⁶¹ Zlosnik and Horner, 79

⁶² Forster, 224

undermining of other significant boundaries. It is not merely the line between masculinity and femininity that is rendered indistinct in Davey's character: a multitude of oppositions collapse beneath his blank, white façade, to the extent that he is exposed as psychopathic, and chillingly other, both friend and enemy, traitor and confidant, saviour and murderer. Indeed, isolated atop Roughtor with this deeply abject monster figure, Mary feels the battered boundary enclosing herself begin to give way: "she thought how very far removed from any sphere of life they were; two beings flung together in eternity, and this was a nightmare with no day to follow, so that soon she must lose herself, and merge into his shadow" (253). Blackness seems to stretch out before her, its interminable quality emphasised by the relentless evocation of images of the void, and she can foresee no changes, only insidious and inexorable continuity of being, the loss of subjectivity and identity. "You'll soon cast your mannerisms aside," the Vicar gently threatens, also anticipating Mary's inevitable loss of self, "and all the poor trappings of civilization you sucked into your system as a child" (247). He explicitly references, in this instance, a regression into the pre-rational state of infancy, of primordial unity with mother's body, from which self emerges and forever after fights the urge to return. "Give way to nature, Mary Yellan" (254) Davey coaxes her, and she finds herself transported into a strange dark world, characterised by the irresistibly amniotic pulsing sound of "a thousand feet," and teeming with ancient creatures who "looked through her and beyond" thus marking her lack of substance, her increasing dissolution (254). This indistinct archaic hell is a place without borders, the final destination of her quest to transgress the bounds of her gender, and it is terrifying.

Mary's experience of limitless chaos, born from the breaking of a gender boundary, drives her into the arms of Jem Merlyn at the narrative's close. Throughout the novel, she has been frank about her attraction to her uncle's roguish younger brother, describing it in simple, chemical terms as an inevitable, ineradicable pull, determined by physiological elements outside her control. "She knew she could love him," we learn, "Nature cared nothing for prejudice" (122). Mary attempts to suppress this growing desire for Jem, however, because she suspects that like the landlord, he is "a murderer of men" (124). She has imagined not only that he is mixed up with Joss's foul company, but that he is the mastermind behind the operation, responsible for ordering the death of that unfortunate wrecker who tried to desert his gang: "A horrible suspicion came into her mind. Could it have been Jem who had hidden in the empty guest room that Saturday night?" she wonders, appalled, "Something went cold inside her" (107). The ramifications of this possibility are far-reaching, with implications

affecting not merely the light in which Jem is cast, but Mary's own character as well. The Merlyn brothers, we learn, are almost identical. Their faces in particular, are strikingly similar, featuring the same "drooping lids", the same "curve of [the] mouth", and "outline of [the] jaw" (61). Jem, however, is without Joss's hulking brutishness, sharing none of the animal characteristics which echo the landlord's savage nature. The younger Merlyn is "smaller in build and height, neater in person" (63), a "head and shoulders" shorter than his brother, and "half the breadth" (64). The two are similarly separated by the sense of degradation, mark of a violent, debauched lifestyle, which hangs about Joss, but by which Jem is not sullied. "The landlord sagged round the chin," Mary observes, "and his shoulders weighed on him like a burden. It was as though his power was wasted in some way, and had run to seed" (64). By contrast, the younger sibling remains "hard and keen," endowed with "a certain strength the eldest brother did not possess" (64). However, this youthful vigour might similarly dissipate, du Maurier reminds us, diluted by a life of crime and moral debasement, to the bestial bulk which characterises the landlord. Jem, Mary realises, is "what Joss Merlyn might have been, eighteen, twenty years ago," (63) and if he does not, in her words, "pull himself together," (64) then his older brother stands before him, an image of his future self. Indeed this transmogrification comes into effect immediately if Jem is the killer Mary fearfully suspects him to be. On the way back from Launceton with Francis Davey she is tormented by the possibility of his guilt.

Somewhere in the dark places of her mind an image fought for recognition and found its way into the light, having no mercy for her feelings. It was the face of Jem Merlyn, the man she loved, grown evil and distorted, merging horribly and finally into that of his brother (150).

As a murderer, Jem takes on all the savage brutality of character by which his brother is defined, and which is represented here in the cruel expression etched onto Joss's wolfish features. His guilt will close the narrow but crucial gap between the two men, exposing Jem to be as much a creature of dark urge as the landlord; one to whom, in Freud's words, "consideration towards his own kind is something alien" enough to kill, and thus alien enough to rape and torture as well.⁶³ For Mary, the implications of this vile merging are devastating. Even convinced the young Merlyn is a murderer, she is unable to neutralise her attraction, hardwired into her as it appears to be, and thus her desire for Jem threatens overwhelmingly to slip into a desire for Joss. After the disastrous wrecking on Christmas Eve, Mary's uncle admits he has "a soft spot" for her, a sinister confession accompanied by a

⁶³ Freud, 49.

suggestive “flicker of meaning in his eyes,” and in which he “laid his fingers on her mouth” (187). Her ambivalent reaction is alarming, and reveals the extent to which she has come, despairingly, to conceive of the two brothers as identical.

She went then to her bed, and sat down upon it, her hands in her lap; and, for some reason forever unexplained, thrust away from her later and forgotten, side by side with the little old sins of childhood and those dreams never acknowledged to the sturdy day, she put her fingers to her lips as he had done, and let them stray thence to her cheek and back again. And she began to cry softly and secretly, the tears tasting bitter as they fell upon her hand. (187-8)

Mary, believing herself to be attracted to a murdering facsimile of her uncle, finds herself dangerously close to his wife’s position of utmost female degradation, supremely vulnerable to domination at the hands of an oppressor who is both bestial and beloved. It is this which distresses her most of all. “She thought of Aunt Patience,” we learn, “trailing like a ghost in the shadow of her master. That would be Mary Yellan too but for her own...strength of will” (139). Her resolve, however, proves to be weaker than expected, and soon she finds herself engaged in an impassioned defence of Jem’s character, which precisely echoes Patience’s make-believe vindications of her own husband. “Jem had denied nothing,” Mary reluctantly concedes, “And now she ranged herself on his side, she defended him...without reason and against her sane judgement, bound to him already because of his hands on her and a kiss in the dark” (145). She suppresses her desire for Jem chiefly because it threatens to relegate her to that role occupied by her cowering, servile aunt, into which her uncle has promised, full of menace, to force her by means of rape.

Having brought her from Jamaica Inn to his Altarnun home, Francis Davey tells Mary that Jem is innocent, and in addition, that he has accomplished the deed she herself set out to achieve, informing against the wreckers and thus reinstating the legal barrier his lawless brother has dissolved. “Nothing mattered now because the man she loved was free and had no stain of blood upon him,” Mary thinks to herself in raptures, “She could love him without shame, and cry it aloud had she the mind” (247). All of her misgivings are nullified by Jem’s innocence. His difference from his brother is clearly established, and thus she is, as she has said, free to love him unfettered by a fear that she might once more find herself caught with a murderous beast in a cruel gender hierarchy, the likes of which she has endured at Jamaica Inn. Her decision to go with him at the novel’s close is, by this account, a happy one. With both villains, and their respective threats, exorcised from the narrative, the way into their future lies cleared before the couple.

In her book *Haunted Heiress*, Auerbach reminds us that *Jamaica Inn* has persistently been labelled a romance,⁶⁴ the genre to which, Janice Radway has written, “a happy ending is indispensable,”⁶⁵ and indeed the novel’s final passage in which Mary, quite literally, rides into the sunset with her lover, appears to satisfy this criterion. However, du Maurier’s conclusions are invariably more complex than this, and while *Jamaica Inn* may fall more clearly into the category of “happy-ending” narratives than the author’s later work, there remains a sense of disquiet which permeates those last pages and subtly undermines the story’s apparently unproblematic resolution. This lingering unease resonates chiefly from the suspicion that Mary’s decision to follow Jem in fact involves very little choice. As Auerbach has written of the narrative’s end: “by now, she has nowhere else to go.”⁶⁶ After her experience with the Vicar on the moors, Mary finds herself faced with two separate life paths: to stay at North Hill as governess to the Bassat children, or to return to Helford in pursuit of her dream of independence and “try and start the farm again” (263). However, neither of these choices is, in light of her experiences, a tenable option. The first signals, as Zlosnik and Horner point out, a life of “servitude,”⁶⁷ and one which is similarly defined by the prescribed limits of the female, child-minding role. Thus, in the subservience it requires, and in virtue of its pre-defined boundaries, this position recalls something of the violently imposed identity into which Mary found herself forced at Jamaica Inn. The second choice, to live by herself on a farm, doing, as she has always planned, “a man’s work” (122), indicates a dangerous destabilisation of the gender binary, of the kind that has delivered Mary into the hands of the Vicar. Indeed, at the narrative’s very beginning, her mother has warned her against such a lifestyle: “A girl can’t live alone,” she tells her daughter, “she goes queer in the head or comes to evil” (10). Thus Jem, and his offer of a “hard life” (266), is the only viable choice. In his wandering existence there is no conventional female identity in which she may become trapped, and at the same time, no threat of genderless chaos: she has clearly stated, after all, that “Jem Merlyn [is] a man, and she [is] a woman,” (123), and it is on this fundamental difference that their heterosexual relationship is founded. In this light the narrative’s happy ending comes into focus, tempered by a grim sense of necessity. “Why are you sitting beside me?” Jem asks, in the novel’s final lines, and in her reply, Mary tells him “Because I must” (267).

⁶⁴ Auerbach, 104

⁶⁵ Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance* (London: Verso, 1987) 66.

⁶⁶ Auerbach, 107.

⁶⁷ Zlosnik and Horner, 84.

Sexuality and the Seed of Curiosity in *Rebecca*

Rebecca, du Maurier's most famous novel, may be seen as a form of bildungsroman: the narrative tracks the progress of the narrator-heroine's difficult transition from innocence and inexperience to a state of knowing maturity.⁶⁸ We follow her younger self, a "raw ex-schoolgirl, red elbowed and lanky haired" (17), through the tense, early days of her unlikely marriage to a mysterious, middle-aged widower, and, at the climax of her story, bear witness as she leaves her child-self behind, and is initiated into adulthood. This older narrator is, in her own words, "very different from that self who drove to Manderley for the first-time" (10). That girl was "hopeful and eager, handicapped by a rather desperate gaucherie, and filled with an intense desire to please" (10). She could not, in the words of Mrs Van Hopper, "string two sentences together" (66). The mature heroine, on the other hand, is assured and reflective, the chief member of her exiled family dyad, and in possession of both the confidence and skill to tell her whole story. The tale of what happens at Manderley is thus, at its simplest, the tale of a girl growing up, overcoming the obstacles with which this process presents her, and ultimately achieving adulthood. In this sense, du Maurier uses the Gothicism with which the narrative is inflected—the ancient, imposing house, its grotesque keeper, a brooding hero-villain and, most importantly, the pervasive ghost of his beautiful late wife—to articulate and amplify the dark hormonal tumult and sense of angst, which inevitably accompany the transition out of childhood. These generic tropes similarly signal the novel's preoccupation with that age-old gothic interest: the family romance. This bildungsroman, in which a girl struggles persistently to become a woman, recounts equally, as we shall see, the female infant's archetypal quest both to achieve the love of her father, and to become an independent identity, separate from her mother. In light of this oedipal structure, the fear of rejection, which haunts the heroine throughout the narrative, signals a danger far more profound than the merely unpleasant prospect of abandonment it initially presents. Rather, the loss of Maxim to Rebecca's memory threatens to collapse the borders of her subjectivity, so that like a child in the midst of oedipal territory, she is forced to fight for her *self*. By returning her to this most perilous and primal battlefield, du Maurier confronts the heroine with the quintessentially gothic threat of disintegration, with the absence of all

⁶⁸ Du Maurier, Daphne, *Rebecca* (London: Virago, 2003) All in-text references are made to the Virago edition of 2007.

boundaries and a return to the chaos of what Jerrold E. Hogle has eloquently termed that “feminised nadir”: the womb.⁶⁹

The triangular relationship with which the narrative is chiefly concerned and which exists, the heroine imagines, between herself, Maxim and Rebecca, is founded on, and indeed echoes, her original, unsuccessful navigation of the Oedipus complex, in which her real parents were the chief players. We learn early on in the novel, Karen Hollinger reminds us, that both the narrator and her mother entertain an obsessive regard for the paternal head of their family,⁷⁰ and the heroine, in particular, demonstrates a possessiveness towards him that suggests a sense of insecurity, born perhaps out of rivalry for his attention. Her mother’s attachment to her husband was, the heroine tells us, “like a vital living force, with a spark of divinity about it” (26). She herself discusses her father in terms which uncover a similar urgency of feeling, and notably that fierce, protective prioritising of exclusivity already mentioned. In her eyes, the man was both “lovely and unusual” and, significantly, her “own secret property. Preserved for [herself] alone” (25). This jealous attitude towards her father is reinforced by a reluctance to “introduce him casually” (25). “I never talked about him” (25) she says, and thus demonstrates a desire not to *share* him, so to speak, with others. Her possessiveness, coupled with the overt acknowledgement of her mother’s similarly powerful regard for him, imply that the heroine remains trapped within the confines of an unresolved triangular scenario. In her comparative analysis of the family romances underpinning du Maurier’s novel and Alfred Hitchcock’s film adaptation, Hollinger suggests that the narrator’s situation might be understood in terms of Nancy Chodorow’s account of the female Oedipus complex.⁷¹ In this light, it becomes clear that a recurring oedipal impasse structures the plot, continuing to resurface, with new players filling the maternal and paternal roles, until an uneasy resolution is finally achieved and the narrative draws to a close.

In his lecture entitled “Femininity,” Freud discusses the case of women who, like the heroine, “remain till a late age tenderly dependent on a paternal object,” and significantly, attributes the phenomenon to the enduring power of a connection with the maternal:

⁶⁹ Jerrold Hogle, “Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture,” *Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 11.

⁷⁰ Karen Hollinger, “The Female Oedipal Drama of *Rebecca* from Novel to Film” in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 14, No. 4 (1993): 22

⁷¹ Hollinger, 20

[There is] a preliminary attachment to the mother, but we did not know that it could be so rich in content and so long-lasting.... In short, we cannot understand women unless we appreciate this [pre-Oedipus] phase.⁷²

Working from this observation, Chodorow argues that the female infant never truly abandons her primary maternal connection. Rather it is retained, and an oedipal attachment to the father develops in addition. In this way, Chodorow builds on the Freudian thesis that “a woman develops out of a child with a bisexual disposition,”⁷³ but unlike Freud, she proposes that a pure “monosexuality”⁷⁴ is never achieved. In her own words, “for the girl there is no absolute change of object [from mother to father]...love for the father...is always tempered by love for the mother.”⁷⁵ The primal, pre-oedipal relationship remains immensely powerful and prevails, simmering beneath oedipal object selection. This original bond is, significantly, chiefly defined by a sense of unity:

Children first experience social and cognitive worlds as continuous with themselves. They do not differentiate objects. The mother as first caretaking figure is not a separate person and has no separate interests, and one of the first developmental tasks is the establishment of a self with boundaries, requiring the experience of the self and mother as separate.⁷⁶

As she begins to engage in this business of separating, the female infant experiences her mother in contradictory terms. She is powerfully alluring—“seductive,” as Chodorow writes⁷⁷—because that original state of continuity was profoundly pleasurable. At the same time, however, this attraction is tainted by threat, since the loss of self amounts, basically, to death. The fear-laced desire, with which the infant comes to regard its mother, disturbs her process of differentiation. The child cannot separate and become an autonomous subject while she still feels a powerful affinity for the maternal, and an urge to return to “the original experience of oneness.”⁷⁸ Similarly, the mother’s developing relationship with her daughter, which involves a degree of identification based on physical symmetry, further decelerates and complicates the infant’s progress. “A mother,” Chodorow argues, “rather than confirming her daughter’s oppositeness and specialness, experiences her as one with herself.”⁷⁹ In this sense, the mother, with whom the daughter was once united, and whose behaviour now encourages

⁷² Sigmund Freud, “Femininity” in *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. & ed. James Strachey (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1971) 583.

⁷³ Freud, 580.

⁷⁴ Sigmund Freud, “Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex” in *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, trans. & ed. A.A Brill (New York: The Modern Library, 1938) 558.

⁷⁵ Nancy Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 69-70.

⁷⁶ Chodorow, 71.

⁷⁷ Chodorow, 71.

⁷⁸ Chodorow, 71.

⁷⁹ Chodorow, 72.

persistent identification, constitutes a serious threat to the establishment of independent selfhood. By contrast, the father “has always been differentiated and known as a separate person with separate interests.”⁸⁰ In the same way that the maternal fosters identity, paternal love confirms that the infant exists in her own right, an individual entity. It is for this reason that the female child turns towards him. Motivated by the threat of dissolution, she uses the father as a mechanism by which she may separate herself from her frighteningly seductive mother.

Love for the mother, then, contains a threat to selfhood that the father never does. Love for the father, in fact, is not simply the natural emergence of heterosexuality. Rather it is an attempt on the girl’s part to break her primary unity and dependence.⁸¹

Thus, the turn towards her father is a pragmatic solution to the girl’s problem. Once this is established, it becomes her goal to ensure that his attention is trained solely on her: she needs to experience paternal *love* in order to be saved from the maternal vacuum. Her relationship with him is thus “characterised by demands for exclusivity,” along with “feelings of competition and jealousy”⁸² towards the mother, with whom she must now vie for his undivided regard.

In *Rebecca*, the narrator’s vehemently possessive attitude towards her father precisely echoes the Chodorovian infant’s regard for her paternal figure. She demonstrates both the urgent longing for his exclusive love, and betrays—with her emphatic jealousy—a sense of anxiety that his attention is not reserved solely for her, but is in part focussed elsewhere. In short, her disposition reveals her mother as a rival, and so confirms the decidedly unresolved nature of her oedipal situation. The narrator remains insecure, on the edge of the ambivalent pre-oedipal abyss, which, in the absence of undivided paternal attention, continues to beckon, yet also threatens to consume her. The circumstances under which her mother dies, confirm the necessity of this (replacement) paternal figure to the female project of separation. It is, we learn, her father’s death that is chiefly responsible for her mother’s demise. Without him she cannot survive, and “linger[s] behind...for five short weeks” (26) before expiring herself. We may argue that this inability to continue without the differentiating male signals a submission to the seductive power of the narrator’s mother’s own maternal origin. Without her paternal substitute to aid her in declaring an independent identity, the narrator’s mother finds herself in the dangerous position of Chodorow’s oedipal girl, caught between the fear of dissolution

⁸⁰ Chodorow, 71.

⁸¹ Chodorow, 71.

⁸² Chodorow, 69.

and the desire for blissful unity. Her death indicates her surrender to the massively attractive force of the womb. She cannot resist it without the separating agency of her husband's love, and so she is pulled back into non-being.

The order in which the narrator's parents die serves also to reinforce the unresolved nature of her Oedipus complex. Her father, whose exclusive love promises to cut the prevailing original connection to the pre-oedipal maternal, takes this possibility of separation with him when he disappears, leaving the narrator alone with her mother in a situation that is dangerously dyadic. When the mother dies, the woman who takes over her role renders explicit this threat to the heroine's identity. Mrs Van Hopper, significantly "a woman old enough to be [the narrator's] mother" (19), is a travesty as far as maternity is concerned. She treats her young "companion" (25) as a kind of general maid, while at the same time embarrassing her constantly, and implicating her frequently in her shameless attempts at social climbing. It is appropriate, then, that she is something of a physical caricature with the exaggerated breasts and hips of a fertility goddess; motherly features that are undercut, however, by an incongruous and irreverently described "expanse of forehead" that is as "bare as a schoolboy's knee" (10). Despite her comic construction, Mrs Van Hopper constitutes a real and concrete threat to the heroine's process of identity formation. This is simply because the position in which the narrator is employed requires that she be entirely self-effacing. Indeed, Hollinger emphasises the "disastrous effect Mrs Van Hopper's foolish femininity and her mistreatment of the heroine have on her young companion's sense of self respect and individuation."⁸³ The older woman expects a quiet assistant, someone passive and obedient who obeys instructions and meets her demands—someone to trot, as the narrator has done, "in her shadow, drab and dumb" (66). The young woman is, in her employer's eyes, saturated by this position. She regards her as quite without any independent volition, or an identity of her own, and nowhere is this more evident than in her surprised reception of the news that the narrator is getting married. "Still waters certainly run deep in your case" (64), she says, clearly articulating the lack of personality by which she has thus far understood her companion to be characterised. As a result of Mrs Van Hopper's sustained attitude, the narrator feels as if she has little will of her own. She sees no alternative, for example, to her employer's decision to leave for America. "Why in heaven's name go with her...?" Maxim asks, to which she simply replies, "I have to" (56). Thus the older woman aptly demonstrates the narcissistic quality by which, Chodorow argues, a mother's relationship with her daughter

⁸³ Hollinger, 22.

is defined, and which results in the child finding it nearly impossible to disengage. Indeed, it is ultimately Maxim who has to break the news to her employer that the narrator is leaving. “You tell her,” she insists fearfully (60). Mrs Van Hopper’s tendency to subsume her young companion beneath the broad terms of her own identity thus suggests the engulfing maternal. She renders her employee, whose primary objective must be the satisfaction of her will, an extension of herself, such that the two women remain at constant risk of being, in the narrator’s own frightened words, “bracket[ed] together” (17).

It is only in terms of Maxim’s sudden interest in the heroine and her company that she begins to feel she might exercise and fulfil a set of desires independent of those of her employer. Significantly, the instance in which she finds the courage to act of her own accord without Mrs Van Hopper’s knowledge or blessing is the first time that she and Maxim venture off together in the car (29). It is only with his support and approval that she can begin to extricate herself from the position of extreme obedience and self-denial, in which her relationship with the older woman places her. In this sense, Maxim takes on the paternal function, and, in the words of Chodorow herself, provides the narrator with the opportunity for a “last ditch attempt to escape”⁸⁴ the circumstances in which her identity is constantly under fire. The oedipal shape of the situation is reinforced by Mrs Van Hopper’s own obvious admiration for Maxim, who, as a “well-known personality” (10) and the owner of Manderley (11) to boot, is just the sort of person in whom she is interested. Her scathing attitude towards the engagement—her “odd feminine...resentment” (66)—clearly signals her jealousy and completes the triangle, which is apparently resolved when Maxim proposes to the narrator and so seems to confirm the exclusive nature of his attachment to her, and his preference for her over the alternative mother figure.

While it seems to be the case that the narrator has at last navigated her way successfully through her oedipal scenario, gaining the exclusive love of her father figure and, consequently, separating herself from the all-consuming threat of the maternal, her experiences at Manderley soon prove this to be false. She has already noticed early on—immediately after her husband’s proposal, in fact—that while he has asked her to marry him, he has not expressly articulated the exclusive and adult nature of his feeling for her.

In love. He had not said anything yet about being in love. No time perhaps. It was all so hurried at the breakfast table.... No, he had not said anything about being in love.

⁸⁴ Chodorow, 72.

Just that we would be married. Short and definite.... Not like younger men who talked nonsense probably, not meaning half they said. Not like younger men being very incoherent, very passionate, swearing impossibilities. Not like him the first time asking Rebecca.... (63)

As we have seen, Chodorow explicitly references paternal affection as necessary to the girl's process of individuation, arguing as follows: "A daughter turns to her father looking for...a sense of separateness from her mother and cares especially about being loved."⁸⁵ The difference the narrator identifies here, before she has even reached Manderley, between Maxim's attitude towards her and the attitude she imagines he held towards Rebecca, leads her to suspect that she is *not* loved as she needs to be; an anxiety which will haunt her throughout the narrative. To her mind, the dry and patronising proposal made to her stands out in stark, depressing, contrast to the exciting exchange, fraught with suspense and passion, that she pictures taking place between her new fiancé and his late wife. While this fantasy scenario overflows with the kind of flamboyance and melodrama that she, in her inexperience, understands as synonymous with love, her own engagement is, by contrast, the product of quite unequivocally ordinary and platonic gestures: her fiancé promises nothing more than to hold her hand and show her his house, calls her a "little fool" (57) and then, to cap it all, tells her "it is a pity that [she] has to grow up" (59). Thus, as she contemplates Maxim's steadfastly restrained behaviour, the narrator surmises that she is not the object of his undivided attention. In a half-hearted attempt to appease her growing sense of insecurity, she lists the woes of a zealous, youthful suitor. Rather than providing her with solace however, her anaphoric iteration of "Not like younger men" becomes a sad, longing refrain, and betrays her *jealousy* of the first Mrs de Winter, whom she imagines to be the recipient of Maxim's now spent adolescent ardour. As the narrative progresses, along with life at Manderley, it grows increasingly clear that the heroine perceives her predecessor as competition—a formidable rival in the quest for Maxim's exclusive attention. "I realise, everyday," she laments, despairing and envious, "that things I lack, confidence, grace, beauty, intelligence, wit—Oh all the qualities that mean most in a woman—she possessed" (148). In this way, the dead woman takes up the role vacated by both Mrs Van Hopper and the heroine's mother. The family triangle, briefly invisible, emerges again and Manderley becomes the site of the final oedipal battle. Within its bounds, the narrator struggles, as we shall see, to withstand the dangerously seductive pull of maternal union and the non-identity it represents, and fights instead to bolster and defend the fragile borders of her emerging self.

⁸⁵ Chodorow, 72.

Maxim's love becomes the knife edge on which her fate teeters, and, like the Chodorovian girl, we find that she is willing "to deny [his] limitations,"⁸⁶ and accept him as a murderer—not merely of his wife, but also, potentially of a child—in order to achieve it.

Upon coming to Manderley, and as a result of her diminishing self-confidence, the narrator develops a morbid fascination with Rebecca, her impossible adversary. Prey to a sudden and compulsive desire to know about her, she begins to gather details, poring over them with an uneasy mixture of gratification and shame.

Sometimes I would glean little snatches of information to add to my secret store. A word dropped here at random, a question, a passing phrase.... The hearing of them would be a furtive, rather painful pleasure, guilty knowledge, learned in the dark. (137)

The narrator's language here quite explicitly marks the experience of contemplating Rebecca as erotic. The "painful pleasure" which accompanies hearing about the first Mrs de Winter precisely echoes Freud's description of arousal, in which he observes that even as "we ascribe the tension of sexual excitation to... feelings of displeasure we are confronted by the fact that it is undoubtedly pleasurable received."⁸⁷ The heroine's quest to gather details about her predecessor, motivated by this building sensation of quasi-gratification, thus becomes an exercise in self-stimulation, which, like adult masturbatory practices, takes place surreptitiously and under cover of darkness. There is, significantly, also a steady, repetitive quality to the passage, which reveals the particularities of its onanistic significance. In the second line, the narrator reiterates short phrases, one after the other, each advancing from and then looping back to "a", and further, in the final sentence, breaks up her syntax again into brief, apposite portions of similar length, creating a varying but insistent pulse. The prose recalls Freud's comment that "rhythmic character must play some part [in the production of pleasure]"⁸⁸ and, in addition, enacts the "rubbing contiguity"⁸⁹ peculiar to genital masturbation. The oedipal phase, to which we have seen the heroine is returned, coincides with the stage of infantile development in which genitalia are the primary erogenous zones, and, Freud notes,⁹⁰ during this period "the little girl...is able to get pleasure by the excitation

⁸⁶ Chodorow, 72.

⁸⁷ Freud, *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, 605.

⁸⁸ Freud, 587.

⁸⁹ Freud, 590.

⁹⁰ Freud classifies this period of clitoral masturbation as pre-oedipal. For him, oedipal territory is entered only when the little girl abandons genital autoeroticism, which is, he proposes, directed at the primary object—the mother—as a result of penis envy. Her efforts in self-stimulation desist when she realizes she and the maternal figure are castrated, and turns to her father, who possesses a penis, in the hopes that she might attain this organ from him. In terms of Chodorow's thesis however, the female infant retains sexualized attachments to both her

of her clitoris.”⁹¹ The acquisition of information, the account of which is characterised by a notably repetitive rhythm, thus becomes even more explicitly masturbatory, and the gratification it affords is rendered something approaching orgasm. The true climax of the narrator’s onanistic endeavours arrives, however, while she is calling on the Bishop’s wife, and, finding that conversation has veered towards the first Mrs de Winter, is prompted to say “Rebecca” for the first time.

I could not believe I had said the name at last...I had said the name. I had said Rebecca aloud. It was a tremendous relief. It was as though I had...rid myself of an intolerable pain. Rebecca. I had said it aloud. I wondered if the Bishop’s wife saw the flush on my face.... (139)

Voicing her predecessor’s name catalyses a dissipation of tension that is explicitly orgasmic. The “intolerable pain” referenced here, recalls that “painful” quality of sexual excitation, and its relief signals equally a sense of gratification. This is rendered even more overt when, only a few hours later, the narrator feels once more an urge to say the word, this time in the company of Frank Crawley. “The name gave me a curious satisfaction,” she observes, “I knew that in a moment or two I should have to say it again” (143). In this way, she reiterates and confirms her onanism—which, according to Freud, always “seeks a pleasure...already experienced and now remember[ed]”⁹²—and simultaneously affirms the sexualised nature of her regard for Rebecca, the focus of her psycho-erotic activities. Thus, it becomes clear that the narrator, like Chodorow’s oedipal infant, not only perceives the maternal figure as a rival, but nurses an attachment to her, the erotic character of which means that it jostles for superiority alongside the attachment to her father: while she loves Maxim “dreadfully” (58), there is no denying the “strange sort of excitement” (143) that the first Mrs de Winter evokes in her. She “oscillates” then, as Chodorow puts it, “in a bisexual relational triangle, in which her relation to her father is...competing for primacy with her relation to her mother.”⁹³

Beneath the sexual attraction to Rebecca, it is possible to discern resonances of another, different pull, of the sort which predates genital superiority, and reveals intimations of the narrator’s dangerous longing to re-experience continuity and non-identity. Significant here is a sustained but subtle metaphor that equates the autoerotic quest for knowledge with a kind of *hunger*. This is perhaps most evident when, having provoked the Bishop’s wife into talking

mother and her father during the oedipal phase, and as such, clitoral masturbation (even when directed at the mother) can be considered an oedipal activity.

⁹¹ Freud, “Femininity,” 590.

⁹² Freud, “Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex,” 586.

⁹³ Chodorow, 70.

about her predecessor the narrator “listen[s] to her greedily” (139), as though the knowledge is something on which to gorge herself, a food of sorts. This comparison is present also in the excerpt at which we have already looked, wherein details about Rebecca are significantly “glean[ed]” (137) like grain. Information thus becomes something to be swallowed and digested, and the narrator’s compulsive curiosity is figured as a sexualised starvation. This marriage of eroticism with hunger, by which her search is inflected, recalls the pre-oedipal infant’s earliest experience of drinking at the maternal breast. During this first, *oral* phase of infantile development, the mouth is the primary erogenous zone, not the genitals, and so feeding is an exercise that not only results in the gratification of appetite, but also is fraught with pleasurable, sexual sensations.⁹⁴ Most importantly, however, it is an activity that is defined chiefly by a sense of unity with the mother. As Freud remarks in *Civilisation and its Discontents*, the nursing baby does not “distinguish [her] ego from the external world as the source of sensations flowing in upon [her].”⁹⁵ At the breast, she is thus one with the maternal figure, and this unified condition is characterized by profound satisfaction so pleasurable its replication becomes the object of prototypical masturbatory acts. Thumbsucking, Freud argues, seeks to reproduce “the first most important activity in the child’s life, the sucking from the mother’s breast,” along with the intensely pleasurable sense of continuity by which it was accompanied.⁹⁶ The narrator’s onanistic pursuit of knowledge, is, as we have seen, governed by a metaphor, which echoes the infantile conflation of arousal with the longing for nourishment: it is cast both as a desire to sate sexual urges and to appease physical appetite, and thus iterates precisely the pre-oedipal call for the breast of the mother. As a masturbatory practice, it is to some extent analogous with oral gratification by means of the thumb, which is, as we have seen, directed at the same kind of yearning. The two autoerotic processes are brought together explicitly as the heroine, in the car on the way home from the name-saying incident, actually “sits in a corner biting [her] thumb nail” (140), while at the same time fantasising about “someone...tall and slim, with dark hair” (141), poring over the knowledge she has gained from the Bishop’s wife. Thus, it becomes clear that there is about her sexualized fascination with Rebecca a sense of pre-oedipal longing. Her compulsive masturbatory endeavors, which seek, at least in part, to re-experience an original bliss born of continuity, signal the massive, magnetic strength of the maternal body, to which the narrator has revealed she is attached, both by genital and pre-genital bonds of attraction. The threat

⁹⁴ Freud, “Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex,” 597.

⁹⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. Joan Riviere, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press & The Institute for Psycho-analysis, 1973) 4.

⁹⁶ Freud, “Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex,” 586.

with which Rebecca's seductive power is laced becomes increasingly evident as the narrative progresses. The heroine is drawn inexorably, and to a great extent *unwittingly*, closer to the shadowy figure of her predecessor, and, as Alison Light has written, "herself begins to fade,"⁹⁷ disappearing beneath the encroaching identity of another woman.

Significantly, all of the narrator's clandestine—and erotically gratifying—investigation into the life of the first Mrs de Winter, has, from the outset, been strictly condemned by Maxim. He refuses to allow his new wife access to information concerning the old one. "All memories are bitter, and I prefer to ignore them" (42) is his response to her initial attempt to find out about her predecessor. Thus, through the covert gathering and storing of forbidden knowledge, the narrator contravenes her husband's wishes, and, in her misbehaviour, becomes inadvertently more like Rebecca, who is ultimately revealed as something of a free agent, heedless of Maxim's rules, and those drawn up by society. In one instance, the narrator's new, uncharacteristic tendency to defy manifests itself overtly as an urge to subvert, not merely her husband's decree, but social order itself. Directly after having disobeyed Maxim's wishes by discussing her predecessor with a visitor, the narrator loses herself in a rebellious fantasy about breaking the entrenched laws of "convention and good country manners" (138). She imagines becoming a recluse, ceasing to call on the county as is required of her, and the words she uses to describe these anti-establishment sentiments echo Rebecca's own, as these are reported by Mrs Danvers. The heroine exclaims as follows: "I did not mind. I did not care. They could say what they liked" (141). And Rebecca, upon cutting her hair unconventionally short, similarly states that she "did not care," and reiterates precisely the narrator's attitude, with the words, "It's nothing to do with anyone but myself" (190). The symmetry between the two women, born of the narrator's increasing and furtive disobedience to her husband, is clear and profound. Her rule-breaking brings her closer to Rebecca by mimicking her character, and in this way, the innocent ex-schoolgirl who "wants...above all to make Mr de Winter happy" (82), is slowly supplanted by someone surreptitious and increasingly transgressive. This steady narrowing of the gap between the narrator and her dead counterpart signals both the success of her masturbatory musing, which is inflected, as discussed, with a pre-oedipal desire to repair differentiation, and also a gradual victory for the seductive mother.

⁹⁷ Alison Light, "'Returning to Manderley': Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality and Class," *The Feminist Review* No. 16 (1984): 11.

Instead of achieving an individual identity of her own, the heroine finds herself eclipsed, to a growing extent, by the first Mrs de Winter. This sense of merging is made quite explicit when, at dinner one evening, the narrator becomes so engrossed in a fantasy about her predecessor, that for a few moments she appears actually to *become* her—much to her husband's distress.

In that brief moment, sixty seconds perhaps, I had so identified myself with Rebecca that my own, dull self did not exist...I wondered what [Maxim] would say if he really knew my thoughts, my heart and mind, and that for one second he had been Maxim of another year, and I had been Rebecca. "You look like a little criminal," he said, "What is it?" (224-5)

Maxim watches as the narrator unconsciously acts out the scenario underway in her head, and his reaction reveals the extent to which, during those moments, his young wife has been taken over by her predecessor in a manner akin to possession. He notices an uncharacteristic "twist" to her mouth, and a "flash of knowledge" in her eyes (226), both of which belong not to the face of a little girl, but rather that of an experienced, adult woman. More importantly, he discerns something *devious* about her demeanour, which is not a part of her fantasy, and which she did not intend. "You looked older, suddenly deceitful," he tells her, and she responds truthfully, saying that she "did not mean to" (226). She has unintentionally and, since she as yet knows nothing of Rebecca's transgressive nature, *unaccountably*, taken on characteristics of the first Mrs de Winter. It becomes quite clear, in this instance, that her autoerotic fantasising, the pre-oedipal quality of which we have already established, results in precisely the kind of continuity with the mother at which it aims. Thus, she is pulled relentlessly closer to an original condition, and her efforts at separation remain ineffectual. Maxim continues to assert that he is "not so very different from a father" (226), and consequently to treat his wife "as if [she] was six" (227): not with adult, exclusive regard, but rather, "as a child...someone to be petted from time to time...but more often forgotten, more often patted on the shoulder and told to run away and play" (219-20). He does not, in short, demonstrate the undivided love and attention that will aid her in the project of differentiation. The narrator remains insecure and jealous, sentiments that fuel the fixated and forbidden fascination with Rebecca, which in turn ensures that, incrementally, the dead woman's identity engulfs her own.

The climax of this gradual merging of daughter with maternal figure unquestionably occurs when, in an attempt to "give Maxim the surprise of his life" (233), and prove to him, once and for all, that she is adult and worthy of his desire, the narrator accidentally turns herself

into Rebecca for the Manderley costume ball. "I felt different already," she observes excitedly while dressing, "no longer hampered by my appearance. My own dull personality was submerged at last" (236). What she does not consciously realise, of course, is that it has been submerged in her predecessor's. This becomes clear as she looks in the mirror, recalling an earlier scenario wherein, at Rebecca's dressing table, she details her depressing ordinariness. "How white and thin my face looked in the glass," she glumly remarks, "my hair hanging lank and straight. Did I always look like this? Surely I had more colour as a rule. The reflection stared back at me, sallow and plain" (187). Now, however, beneath the wig and Caroline de Winter's soft, white dress, this "mousey haired self" (237) disappears, to be replaced by someone else far more striking and grown up.

I did not recognise the face that stared at me in the glass. The eyes were larger surely, the mouth narrower, the skin white and clear? The curls stood away from the head in a little cloud. I watched the self that was not me at all and then smiled; a new slow smile (237-8)

This pale, black-haired mirror image, reflects, without doubt, the first Mrs de Winter, whose "cloud of dark hair and very white skin" (139) the narrator now counts among her own attributes. Thus, what she describes upon looking into the glass is a physical merging with the maternal, of the sort about which the pre-oedipal infant dreams. There is similarly a suggestion, in her sudden body confidence, of a personality rather different to the heroine's own, defined, as it has been, chiefly by shyness and diffidence. The "new slow smile" in response to her appearance, reveals self-assurance, satisfaction, and a seductive quality that we will come to associate with Rebecca. In short, it appears that total continuity of mother and daughter has been achieved. Both the narrator's body and her character have been profoundly altered, remoulded into those of the first Mrs de Winter. Chodorow's engulfing maternal origin appears to have claimed her female progeny and, thus, also an oedipal victory.

Rebecca's triumph becomes even clearer, when, after the ball fiasco, Maxim disappears, horrified at having been confronted by his dead wife, and the heroine is left alone, distraught and convinced that her marriage, along with the chance at maternal separation it represents, has been destroyed.

Maxim was not in love with me. He had never loved me...What I had thought was love for me, for myself as a person was not love...He did not belong to me at all. He belonged to Rebecca. He still thought of Rebecca. He would never love me because of Rebecca. (261)

The narrator forces herself to recognise that Maxim's affections are not, and never have been, directed towards her. The love of the paternal figure is categorically fixed to the maternal, and thus not available to her. The oedipal nightmare is realised and she is abandoned, doomed to repeat the fate of her own mother. She has no choice but to surrender to the pull of the womb, which has been steadily consuming her throughout the narrative. Little by little her own character has disappeared into this maternal vacuum, subsumed beneath the identity of the first Mrs de Winter, and now, forsaken by the father, she stands on the very brink of nothingness and immateriality, ready to dissolve. Mrs Danvers confirms her proximity to non-being, telling her "It's you that's the shadow and the ghost" (275), as if Rebecca, in her gradual possession of the heroine, has somehow sapped her substance. Indeed the narrator, upon realising her predicament, emphasises the new definite and solid qualities with which her rival is imbued. "I knew her figure now," she says, "The long slim legs, the small narrow feet. Her shoulders...her capable, clever hands" (262). Rebecca's transition from obscurity to clarity in the heroine's mind tracks the increase of her power, and the narrator's own proportional weakening, until minutes before she finds herself teetering on a window ledge, she says, "Her I could not fight. [Rebecca] was too strong for me" (262). Acting as her dead mistress's earthly agent, Mrs Danvers takes it upon herself to facilitate the heroine's final transition into non-being. Soothingly, she tries to persuade her to leap from the window in Rebecca's room, rendering the threat attached to primal unity absolutely explicit. "Why don't you jump...?" she asks, softly, gently, "Then you won't have to be unhappy anymore" (276).

The fog came thicker than before and the terrace was hidden from me.... There was nothing but the white mist about me... The only reality was the windowsill beneath my hands and the grip of Mrs Danvers on my left arm. If I jumped I would not see the stones rise up to meet me, the fog would hide them from me...It would soon be over. And Maxim did not love me...I was beginning to forget about being unhappy. (276-7)

An irresistibly Freudian symbol, the open window, on the other side of which lies non-identity, strongly suggests a way back into the female body. The thick, colourless mist, representation of nothingness, does the work of the engulfing womb, reversing the heroine's capacity to identify objects separate from herself. It consumes the heterogeneous world, obscuring the differences between things, melding them together until, the terrace, the room—everything—is white and continuous, and all that remains are the feeling of fingers around the narrator's arm and the ledge, a final threshold, on which she leans. It is death that lies below her, beckoning, on the fog-swathed paving stones, and to her it signals a sweet oblivion, a blissful end to "unhappiness," the absence of thought and feeling, and a condition

which recalls precisely original unity with the mother. The seductive pull of the primal vacuum, to which we have seen the heroine slowly succumb throughout the narrative, now takes on all the attractive force of gravity itself, drawing her inexorably, physically, down towards Hogle's "nadir," the maternal abyss.

"An explosion that shook the window" interrupts proceedings, and prevents the narrator from leaping into the mist (277). It is a foundering ship, which sinks in the bay, and significantly, catalyses the dredging up of Rebecca's body. This grisly resurfacing of the aptly named *Je Reviens* (as well as explicitly echoing the return of Freud's repressed) forces Maxim to confess both his crime, and his undying affection for the narrator. "I love you so much" (300), he finally tells her, and also, "I hated [Rebecca]" (304). This declaration fulfils all of her Chodorovian needs, and, safe in the knowledge that she has achieved exclusive paternal attention, the heroine finally makes the transition from child to adulthood. "I've grown up, Maxim," she tells her husband, explicitly articulating her newfound maturity. "I'll never be a child again" (296). The critical moment in her bildungsroman has been achieved, and Maxim, in turn, confirms her shift out of infancy, lamenting the loss of "that funny, young lost look" (336), and treating her for the first time, not as a daughter, but as a desirable woman. "He began to kiss me," the narrator says, "He had not kissed me like this before...hungry, desperate, murmuring my name" (300).

Along with the assurance of his exclusive attention, Maxim gives his young wife the tools with which to achieve differentiation—with which, significantly, to *abject* the mother. As he reveals the details of his first marriage, confirming as he does both his love for the narrator, and her difference from the late Mrs de Winter, he furnishes her with information that will allow her to reverse the effects of her regressive masturbatory fantasising, and draw a line between herself and Rebecca. It is the dead woman's refusal to adhere to a conventional female identity which chiefly renders her a candidate for abjection. While alive, Maxim divulges, she was in possession of an unconventionally voracious, almost predatory, sexual appetite. She pursued her male victims, like prey, attempting to seduce any and all of the men she met. Included in this list are both Giles, Maxim's brother-in-law, and Frank, whom she hunted in particular. "Poor shy faithful Frank," Maxim explains, "She never left him alone...she was always going down to his house, trying to get him to the cottage" (308). In short, Rebecca demonstrates, with her active and rampant lust, a traditionally *masculine* brand of sexuality, a hybridity visible also at a physical level. Mrs Danvers references her mistress's boyish height, narrow shape and incongruously feminine feet and face, and Maxim

himself describes his dead wife as a “boy with a face like a Botticelli Angel” (312). It is clear, thus, that she is a hermaphrodite figure, both masculine and feminine, and that the border which separates gender identities one from the other, cannot, in her case, maintain its stability. This capacity to dismantle the boundaries enclosing conventional femininity takes several different forms, which resurface repeatedly during Maxim’s tirade: Rebecca is, for example, both “the perfect wife” (313) and an adulteress; the picture of domestic success, with her “blasted taste” (307), and the proprietress of a sordid London den, to which her husband refers as “a hole in [a] ditch” (301). The heroine with her conservative sensibilities (offended, she reveals early in the narrative, by “women with untidy hair” [33]) responds to this new understanding of her predecessor with disgust. Not “kind and sincere” (149) as she originally imagines her, Rebecca becomes, in light of her transgressions, “evil and vicious and rotten” (319). The change affects every facet of the dead woman’s image such that her body, of which the young Mrs de Winter has previously been so envious—that “tall, slim” figure (212)—transmogrifies into something quite explicitly monstrous. “The real Rebecca took shape,” she says to herself. She “was someone who walked through the woods by night...She gave you the feeling of a snake” (305). With the help of her husband, the heroine has transformed her once venerated predecessor into an abject creature: a strange, gothic amalgam of human and reptile, redolent both of the gorgon and the lamia, the phallic nature of which reflects Rebecca’s unpalatable hermaphroditic sexuality. In this way, the narrator dissociates from the maternal, marking herself off and finally confirming the boundaries of her own, autonomous subjectivity. Thus, the oedipal battle draws to a close. “Rebecca had not won,” the heroine exclaims elated, “Rebecca had lost” (320).

However, this resolution is uneasy. Although separation has occurred, the maternal threat has not, as the narrator believes, disappeared completely. Chodorow suggests, as we have seen, that love for the paternal figure is tempered always by a connection to the mother, and, “regardless of the girl’s intentions,”⁹⁸ this primary bond endures, though weakened, even after a measure of oedipal resolution has been achieved. Thus, although the narrator has set up a barrier between herself and the pre-oedipal vortex of desire and fear, some of the identity with the maternal, which existed prior to separation, remains. This continuing narcissistic connection, binding mother to daughter, is manifested chiefly in a covert, and unconscious, allegiance to Rebecca, which, it becomes clear, hovers below the surface of the older heroine’s narrative endeavour. Nowhere is this authoritative presence more evident than

⁹⁸ Chodorow, 70.

in the dream scenario, in which the two Mrs de Winters are united once more, significantly conjoined in the task of writing. “I was sending out invitations,” the heroine says, “I wrote them all myself with a thick black pen. But when I looked down to see what I had written it was not my small square handwriting at all, it was long and slanting, with curious pointed strokes” (426). Though she has written the content of the invitations *herself*, the heroine takes care to point out, she sets her words down in Rebecca’s “bold, slanting hand” (47), which she has, throughout the narrative, associated with the dead woman’s autonomy and poise. While we might see the narrator’s adoption of this fluent script, “so certain, so assured” (47), as representative, to some extent, of her transition from anxiety and diffidence to Rebecca-style confidence and security, there remains something sinister about those sweeping inky points, which suggests a barbed underside to her newfound maturity. Indeed, Zlosnik and Horner discern “a waywardness” about the print, “which opposes the meaning of the words it traces.”⁹⁹ The narrator’s thoughts appear on paper tainted by Rebecca’s transgressive quality. The writing is a joint enterprise, serving the interests of both the heroine and her predecessor, and, in this way, it reveals the existence of that persisting Chodorovian connection between mother and daughter. Rebecca’s power has thus not “dissolved” (320), as the narrator initially imagines. Though dulled, it remains, and this becomes particularly evident as the dream progresses.

I saw then that [Rebecca] was sitting on a chair before the dressing table in her bedroom, and Maxim was brushing her hair. He held her hair in his hands, and as he brushed it he wound it slowly into a thick rope. It twisted like a snake, and he took hold of it with both hands...and put it round his neck. (426-7)

The snake-hair, with which the dream-Maxim tries to kill himself, explicitly resembles, in its thick, sinuous blackness, the writing with which the narrator inadvertently covers her pages. The two are synonymous, analogous in appearance, and of identical origin. In virtue of this symmetry, the words take on the same lethal quality as the shifting reptilian locks: they too might catch and destroy Maxim. If we consider the nature of the heroine’s tale it seems that this is not far from the truth. Her story catalogues her husband’s guilt, and so it does, in effect, weave him a noose with words. Just as she directs the pen strokes on the invitation cards, Rebecca writes the narrative along with her young successor, so that the heroine’s story of love and the difficult journey out of childhood, is equally an incriminating and

⁹⁹ Sue Zlosnik & Avril Horner, “The Secrets of Manderley: Rebecca” in *Daphne du Maurier: Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination* (Macmillan Press: London, 1998) 114.

condemning tale of misogynistic violence, exposing a paternal crime, and thus risking the destruction of the father, mechanism of differentiation, at retributive hands. Rebecca's triumph, though no longer imminent as once it was, remains possible. Maxim's fate lies solely with the narrator, the only keeper of his secret, and, until the moment she woke up and wrote "Last night I dreamed I went to Manderley again..." it was safe.

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Hypnotised by her Small White Hands: Seduction and Masochism in *My Cousin Rachel*

In *My Cousin Rachel* du Maurier creates a heroine every bit as slippery, elusive and above all *potent* as her infamous Rebecca.¹⁰⁰ As in the case of that absent character, we are never allowed to see Rachel for ourselves, head on and without mediation. She appears only refracted through the subjectivity of a profoundly unreliable narrator, whose personal blindnesses successfully ensure his account obscures a great deal more than it elucidates. The extent to which Philip's juvenile myopia is made obvious to the reader serves persistently to remind us that no description of Rachel—even those offered by apparently clear-headed characters Rainaldi or Louise—can be trusted unequivocally. In every case there remains a potential for personal bias that we can never conclusively discount. Perhaps, for instance, Philip's childhood friend really is jealous of Rachel, as he believes, and it is envy which informs her low opinion of the older woman. Du Maurier gives us no means of answering such questions. Instead, she persistently ensures that, throughout the narrative, similar ones arise, with the result that the implausible is never impossible in *My Cousin Rachel*, and the unlikely always haunts the probable. There is no one unquestionable truth about the nature of the heroine, but rather a selection of regularly conflicting impressions and speculations, each as apparently valid as the next: Ambrose and Philip call her “unfeminine” [91], while the Vicar thinks her “decidedly feminine” (117). Similarly, Philip remains convinced she is a “woman of impulse and emotion,” while Louise firmly believes it is “in [her] nature to plan the months ahead” (276). At the narrative's conclusion both reader and characters alike remain ill-equipped to determine conclusively whether Rachel is impulsive or calculating, feminine or unfeminine, witch or botanist, loose-living whore or nurturing caregiver, opportunistic gold-digger or genuine grieving widow. In each case du Maurier furnishes us with evidence to support both sides of the binary, and so Rachel appears unconstrained by laws that create mutual exclusivity. For example, Philip and the country-folk conceive of her remedies as “charms” (328) and “witchcraft” (150), and she herself defers to “[h]erb-lore [which] is very ancient,” passed down through the women of her family. Yet she also explicitly references academic texts, “*The New Botanic Garden...Bold Court. Fleet Street. 1812*” (332), for instance, and thus straddles the divide between science and magic. Similarly,

¹⁰⁰ Daphne du Maurier, *My Cousin Rachel* (London: Virago, 2007) all further references made in-text to this edition.

her promiscuous mother with whom she vied for male attention, her lavish Florence lifestyle of aristocratic admirers, extra-marital affairs and duelling lovers, and the way in which she uses intimacy as currency, exchanging sex with Philip for the jewels he has given her (“I wanted to thank you” [270]), all present her as a kind of prostitute, a “loose-living” mercenary whore, and so stand in stark contrast to the picture of the nurturing maternal she also presents throughout the text. Indeed she whole-heartedly takes up the role of nurse (which Rainaldi tells Philip is more usually reserved for “nuns” [47]) twice in the narrative, and treats Philip persistently as if he were a child and she, in her own words, a “pleasant [and] homely” matron (136).

Thus, Rachel appears to fill impossibly conflicting roles equally and simultaneously, and in this sense resembles Jean Baudrillard’s seductress: a powerful, shifting, opalescent figure of “pure appearance” who undertakes an “artificial reworking”¹⁰¹ of herself, regardless of real-world obstacles, to become whichever character the business of seduction requires. He describes this figure:

[Her] strategy is to be there/not there and thereby produce a sort of flickering, a hypnotic mechanism that crystallises attention outside all concern with meaning... She constantly avoids all relations in which, at some given moment, the question of truth will be posed. She undoes them effortlessly, not by destroying them or denying them, but by making them shimmer. Here lies her secret: in the flickering...¹⁰²

Du Maurier situates Rachel simultaneously at either end of multiple polarities, as we have seen, and thus produces precisely this holographic “shimmering.” Throughout the narrative we attempt to define her and, in this process, vacillate between options, working from the logical premise that she cannot occupy two opposing roles at once. Rachel the murderer disappears, for example, as we consider Rachel the victim, but reappears again when some fresh piece of damning evidence surfaces. Thus she shimmers almost literally, back and forth, and in doing so destabilises the rational structures which create mutually exclusive binaries by “eclipsing” the border that separates them every time she crosses it. It is in this sense that she makes reason and the world—what Baudrillard terms “truth”—flicker until we accept that she is not confined to any single position but in fact occupies all the contradictory roles she is assigned.

It is in the early stages of Rachel’s visit that Louise remarks to Philip: “How simple it must

¹⁰¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, trans. Brian Singer (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1990) 87.

¹⁰² Baudrillard, 84.

be for a woman of the world like Mrs Ashley to twist a young man like yourself round her finger” (133), and thus overtly suggests that, unbeknownst to him, his Italian cousin is in the process of seducing him. Central to Baudrillard’s discussion of seduction is what he terms “the eclipse of a presence,”¹⁰³ which Rachel literalises with her threat, repeated on numerous occasions, to leave the estate. For Philip, her presence in the Ashley household is always tainted by her impending absence, the horror of which he can never quite ignore.

Like a weather-glass I swung, from moods of exultation...to a low level sometimes of dullness and depression when, remembering her promise to remain with me for a brief time only, I wondered how much longer she would stay....Any day she might decide to go and I would not be able to...hold her back. (179)

The knowledge of her imminent but unpredictable departure haunts Philip, ironically while she is very close to him, living in his house. She shimmers before him, a mirage, almost within reach but never quite solid or dependable. Even though Rachel is demonstrably *there*, he still connects her in part with something absent and *not-there*, and so, in Baudrillard’s formulation, she eclipses her presence. This seductive manoeuvre informs the structure of the narrative to a great extent, as it incites Philip’s increasingly extreme attempts to quash his anxiety, and secure the promise of her indefinite and uncomplicated company. What was supposed to be a two-day visit, he extends four times until it lasts nearly a year, and eventually offers his property and hand in marriage as incentives for Rachel to stay. It would thus appear that as part of an overall strategy, her “there/not there” tactic is particularly effective. Upon perusing the fateful contract, Nick Kendall points out that Philip, who initially believed Rachel to have “nothing remarkable about her at all” (86), has become “completely infatuated with [his] cousin” (245). He has, in short, been seduced, and Baudrillard’s suggestion that “seduction always...overturn[s] and exorcise[s] a power”¹⁰⁴ is about to play out in concrete terms: the authority that comes with owning and controlling the land will be transferred from Philip to his Italian cousin when the contract takes effect, and he will become a dependent, entirely subject to her control. In this way, Rachel’s flickering presence directs the *pattern* of Philip’s seduction, which in turn informs the plot of the novel.

“The seductress’ artificial reworking of her body” Baudrillard writes, “is directed at the man’s...desire.”¹⁰⁵ This is true of Rachel: the character she becomes for her young cousin

¹⁰³ Baudrillard, 85.

¹⁰⁴ Baudrillard, 87.

¹⁰⁵ Baudrillard, 87.

speaks directly to his deep-seated and, to a great extent, unacknowledged, longing for his mother. Philip's earliest life—what Freud terms the “oral” or “cannibalistic” stage¹⁰⁶ of his psychosexual development—is punctuated by abrupt ruptures in the constancy of the maternal presence. First, his own mother dies when he is barely more than a year old. Then, following his adoption into the Ashley home, his nurse, hired expressly as a mother-substitute is banished violently by Ambrose. Thus this period, which is characterised by the total dependence of a helpless child upon its mother, is for Philip traumatically fragmented. Follower of Freud, Karl Abraham, argues that this kind of disturbance in the oral phase resonates profoundly all the way into later life, where a yearning to reinstate the conditions of early infancy will continue to direct adult behaviour, resulting in the formation of what he terms a particularly *oral personality*.

Freud describes the formative oral period as characterised chiefly by pleasurable sensations of unity with the maternal, achieved through drinking from her breast. The oral infant does not, he proposes, distinguish between its mother and her milk. Feeding is thus an exercise in primal cannibalism and as such results in what the child imagines is a physical merging with the maternal through her “incorporation...into [its] own body.”¹⁰⁷ In addition, this baby “has not yet separated [sexual activity] from the taking of nourishment”¹⁰⁸—its mouth is its chief erogenous zone—and so the anthropophagous process of unification is gratifying, not merely in terms of hunger, but in an erotic sense as well. The infant experiences the oral phase as a period blissful satiation that is both sexual and appetitive. The mother is the bountiful source of this pleasure and nourishment, and the oral child is unconditionally dependent on her. Thus, when she suddenly ceases to exist in this capacity, it feels emptiness, acute discontent and a profound longing for her and the state she represents. According to Abraham, it is this futile sense of hunger, directed at the maternal body, which will “[re]appear under different disguises during the whole of [the infant's] life.”¹⁰⁹

Given certain conditions...the sucking period can be an extremely displeasurable one for the child. In some cases its earliest pleasurable craving is imperfectly gratified, and it is deprived of the enjoyment of the sucking stage...[thus] it takes leave of the

¹⁰⁶ Sigmund Freud, “Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex,” *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, trans. & ed. A.A Brill (New York: The Modern Library, 1938) 597.

¹⁰⁷ Freud, 597

¹⁰⁸ Freud, 597.

¹⁰⁹ Karl Abraham, “The Influence of Oral Erotism on Character Formation,” *Selected Papers by Karl Abraham* trans. Douglas Bryan, ed. Alix Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1949) 395.

sucking stage under difficulties.¹¹⁰

As we have seen, Philip's own oral phase is characterised by the disappearance of female nurturers and so fraught with precisely this sense of "imperfect gratification." As a result the adult Philip possesses various traits typical of Abraham's oral personality, not least among which is his frequently referenced enthusiasm for food. "This boy is forever eating...", Rainaldi says. "I saw him demolish a whole pie for dinner yesterday" (233). Abraham explicitly cites an "intense appetite"¹¹¹ as exemplary of the orally ungratified subject's futile attempt to sate his primal hunger for the mother's body. In another example, Philip describes himself, in the narrative's opening moments, as someone who above all "crave[s] affection" (5). This not only suggests insufficient engagement with a loving mother, but also recalls Abraham's observation that the oral character "always seems to be asking for something, either in the form of a modest request or an aggressive demand."¹¹² Indeed this statement appears particularly apt when we consider that Philip both requests that Rachel stay with him, saying politely "If you remained here...it would help us all" (145), and violently commands that she "never leave [him]," his hands locked around her throat (271). In a final example, we are repeatedly shown Philip's oral tendency towards *impatience*. He is particularly unwilling to put off any kind of activity from which he believes he will derive pleasure, recalling the hungry infant as it eagerly anticipates its mother's breast. He finds it impossible, for example, to keep the jewels from Rachel until the morning of his birthday, and similarly cannot bring himself to postpone the announcement of his (imaginary) engagement to his cousin. It is clear, in this light, that Philip's difficult early childhood bears upon the formation of his character, and is responsible to a great extent for his particularly *infantile* temperament. This immaturity is apparent, as we have seen, in his impatience, his tendency to demand and, significantly, also in his reluctance to accept what Abraham terms "hard facts...[or] reasonable arguments"¹¹³ that would deny Philip what he wants. Nick Kendall references this particular trait explicitly when he says to his godson, who refuses to allow that Ambrose died of natural causes, "Your trouble is you will not reconcile yourself to the fact...You won't believe it" (57). Philip's childish antics can almost always be explained in terms of this oral character and so it becomes clear that his behaviour is fundamentally informed by a yearning for the vanished mother of that early stage: a bountiful figure associated with pleasure,

¹¹⁰ Abraham, 397.

¹¹¹ Abraham, 404.

¹¹² Abraham, 400.

¹¹³ Abraham, 400.

gratification and, significantly, a sense of full and blissful union.

It is into the position of this oral maternal that Rachel steps in order to seduce her young cousin. She recognises his stunted development—his oral immaturity—and treats him, a man of twenty-four, very much like a young child. With her he becomes “a great...baby,” (248) a “sulky schoolboy,” (228), and a “spoilt child” (102)—all examples of the myriad indulgent terms she uses to refer to him and his infantile behaviour, and by which she designates herself as mother. From the outset she actively takes on this role. Even their very first encounter closes with her ordering him in a matronly fashion to “please get up and go to bed” (86). Philip responds to this behaviour immediately, and musing over the incident afterwards, recognises her words as something his nurse, the last mother figure he knew, “might have said to [him] twenty years ago” (89). After this first meeting, it is already clear that he has begun to imagine Rachel as the lost object for which he has been searching, and nowhere is this more evident than in his persistent obsession with her hands. We see them and their curious, attractive quality represented repeatedly throughout the narrative: “I was aware of her hands, narrow and small and white” (85), for example, and later “I had held [her hand] many times, in love” (321).¹¹⁴ When considered in conjunction with his longing for the abundant mother of the oral stage, this fascination, reiterated time and again, rings clearly of *fetishisation*. Freud defines the fetish object as a “substitute for the woman’s [the mother’s] penis,”¹¹⁵ and this, it seems, is particularly apt here. Since Philip wants to imagine Rachel in terms of the bountiful and pleasurable pre-oedipal state of undifferentiated bliss from which, significantly, *nothing was lacking*, it is necessary for him to replace the member he (as an adult) knows is missing from her body. “It was easier” he says at one point, “if I did not look directly at her, but at her hands” (99), thus enacting precisely the Freudian boy’s refusal “to take cognisance of the fact of his having perceived that a woman does not possess a penis.”¹¹⁶ Castrated, Rachel cannot signify pre-oedipal wholeness and plenitude, only the potential of Philip’s own dismemberment, and thus he needs to deny the real nature of her genitals in favour of a fantasy wherein her hands take on the significance of the male member. This identification of fingers with penis becomes particularly explicit, again, during the first meeting. Rachel’s hands are noted for their peculiarly “narrow” quality. They look, significantly, like “the hands of someone in a portrait painted by an old master and left

¹¹⁴ For further examples see: 80, 140, 156, 123.

¹¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, “Fetishism,” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. & ed. James Strachey, Vol XXI (London: Hogarth Press, 1961) 152.

¹¹⁶ Freud, 153

unfinished” (80). Thus, not only are they a fraction of the width of an ordinary hand, rendering them more overtly phallic in shape, but the simile at work associates them also with the connotation of mastery usually connected to the male organ. In this way, Philip engages in the process of disavowal in terms of which fetishism functions, and manages to convince himself, in the face of stark reality, that Rachel lacks nothing.

The nature of his regard for her is finally rendered indubitable when, in church, he identifies her directly and overtly with his own mother, in whom he has thus far expressed little interest, and of whom he now thinks, unsurprisingly, as representative of the loving tenderness characteristic of the oral maternal.

I had never thought much about [my parents], Ambrose had answered for them both. But now, looking at my cousin Rachel, I wondered about my mother. I wondered...what it felt like as a child, being held in my mother's arms. Had she touched my hair and kissed my cheek, and then, smiling, put me back into the cradle? I wished suddenly that I could remember her.... (113)

Rachel prompts Philip to imagine a return to the primal state of dependence upon the nurturing mother. In his fantasy he is cradled as he would have been during breast-feeding. This evokes a yearning to return to the abundant security of the maternal body, blazoned here as touch, kiss, and the safety of enveloping arms, which, since his adoption into his cousin's household, he has not had the chance to experience.

We learn at the narrative's very beginning that Philip and Ambrose are almost identical. "I looked like Ambrose," he says, "I felt like Ambrose" (5). Indeed this shared identity, which extends beyond appearance to personality, is one the young Philip, whose "whole object...was to resemble" his surrogate father, cultivated (2). This wilful identification persists after Ambrose's demise so that Philip, on inheriting the estate, immediately aligns himself with his dead cousin, supporting the decision to omit Rachel from the will, and reacting aggressively when Nick Kendall brings up the issue. "Claim?" he exclaims outraged, "Good God" (57). Philip stands firmly against the idea that the widow should be allowed to keep even the most insignificant among Ambrose's things and remarks with offended vitriol "that the day after the funeral she [went] off like a thief, taking all [her husband's] possessions with her...." (57). We are reminded that Philip's relationship with his adopted father is one that is founded as much on property as it is on more intimate familial and psychological connections: he is, after all, his cousin's chosen *heir*. The urgency with which he iterates his claim to *all* of Ambrose's possessions reveals the extent to which he

understands his connection to his cousin in these terms, as if without his *things* the special bond between them would evaporate. When his godfather remarks that, should Ambrose have a son, Philip will no longer be next in line to inherit the estate, he immediately equates the loss of his position as heir with the loss of his cousin's love.

What he suggested was so new and unexpected that I could barely think straight...I had never once seen myself an outcast. No longer wanted, put out of my home.... A child arriving who would call Ambrose father so that I should no longer be needed...I did not want to live anywhere else or possess another property. Ambrose had brought me up and trained me for this one alone. It was mine. It was his. It belonged to both of us. (22)

In this sense we can see that ownership of the estate is a means by which Philip asserts his affinity with his cousin. In the position of heir, more usually reserved for offspring, he becomes a surrogate son and Ambrose his adopted father, but without the house and land, the two are no more than cousins, tenuously connected. Thus, we can see Philip's aggressively possessive attitude towards Ambrose's things (even those inconsequential belongings Rachel takes from the Villa) as part of an attempt actively to maintain the father-son bond with his cousin, which he believes consists, fundamentally, in the inheritance of his property.

As Rachel's visit progresses, however, Philip becomes increasingly uncomfortable with his status as sole inheritor. This unease climaxes in the momentous decision to relinquish some of Ambrose's treasured property and pay her an allowance from the estate. It is significant that, at the same time as Philip gives Rachel access to Ashley funds, he realises how suddenly this new generosity has taken hold of him. "Two or three days ago I would not have cared," he observes, "She could have starved." Since her arrival, however, "everything had changed" (127). In the short space of time between her entrance into the Ashley home and this moment of revelation, Rachel has, as I have suggested, come to represent the oral mother, for whom Philip has been unconsciously searching, and in this capacity she is able to interfere with his fierce guardianship of the estate. Directly before his decision to subsidize her, Rachel and Philip share an intimate moment, the description of which is heavily-laden with maternal significance. "She looked at me," he says, "I smiled back...We seemed to hold each other for a moment. It was queer, strange. The feeling went right through me" (119). Philip's diction echoes the earlier passage in which he longs to remember "being held in [his] mother's arms" (113) and figures looking at Rachel as a kind of mutual embrace. The metaphor reverberates with motherly connotations of dependence and unity, and the "queer" feeling that goes "right through" him resembles irresistibly the Freudian infant's "motor response [to sucking the

nipple] in the form of orgasm.”¹¹⁷

In this light, it is clear that Philip’s perception of Rachel as primordial, loving mother prompts him to surrender some of his beloved estate in the form of an allowance. His sudden change in attitude towards the property that we have seen binds him to Ambrose as a son to his father, reveals a profound reshuffling of Philip’s allegiances. As he continues to redistribute the estate, giving Rachel gradually more access to Ambrose’s possessions, we see that he slowly disconnects himself from his cousin and begins to side with her instead. “I found myself blaming Ambrose,” Philip complains, having paid Rachel her first allowance, “Surely he might have taken some thought for the future.” (142). Here, the transfer of inherited money to Rachel is followed by an open criticism of the previously venerated father figure. As he gives her access to the estate Philip shifts overtly away from Ambrose, whom he no longer idolises in this instance, but *blames*. This reconfiguration of alliances is consolidated and confirmed when, in an event that prefigures his decision legally to abandon his inheritance altogether, Philip aligns himself overtly with Rachel, burying Ambrose’s unsent and incriminating letter beneath a slab of granite. Property once again proves a sound indicator of his loyalty. Philip has given Rachel unofficial control over the household—as “the mistress” (175) she oversees menu, decor, hospitality and the design of the new gardens—and in this space his fidelity is unequivocally fixed to her.

Back in the house my loyalty was with [Rachel]. In the boudoir, with my eyes upon her face, watching those hands...Yet here in the woods beside the slab of granite, where we had so often stood together, he and I, Ambrose holding the very stick I carried now, wearing the same coat, here his power was strongest. (205)

Ambrose does not interfere inside the house because there Philip has, for all intents and purposes, relinquished the ownership that we have seen ties him to his cousin. In that environment, he is the heir in name only. However, the “five hundred acres” of working estate land, remain, in Philip’s words, “[his] own” (167), as Ambrose left them to him, and out of Rachel’s reach. Thus his connection with his surrogate father persists outside the domestic space, and “in the woods” Philip experiences it acutely. Here he is still his cousin’s chosen inheritor, both in word and deed, bound to him by their land and affected by his wishes. The link is rendered overt in this context, and indubitable, manifesting itself in visible, physical terms (they carry the same stick, wear the same jacket). No matter how hard

¹¹⁷ Freud, “Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex”, 585.

Philip attempts to convince himself that he is independent, with his “own life to make and [his] own will to follow” (205), here Ambrose continues to bear upon his actions, and count in his judgements. It is this remaining sense of fidelity to his cousin, which prompts Philip to read the letter—a loyalty implicit in the fear that Ambrose would otherwise “condemn” him (205). It is similarly this fidelity that is interred with the paper, which, wrapped in the leather of Philip’s pocket book, becomes a kind of corpse, recalling the body of the man himself. This surrogate Ambrose is placed in its grave beneath the aptly titled “tombstone” (204) rock in a burial which explicitly enacts the process of repression. The image of his cousin which flared up so powerfully as he stood looking down on the prospect Ambrose loved most, is concealed “in the deep dark earth” (209), and thus symbolically laid to rest, rejected. Entombment complete, Philip turns his back on the territory that had been Ambrose’s and, full of intentions to transfer this land and all it signifies into Rachel’s control, returns to the house, in which, as he has said, his “loyalty is with her,” the nurturing maternal (205).

In *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, Gilles Deleuze argues that this is precisely the kind of allegiance out of which *masochistic* urges arise. “The masochist’s experience,” he argues “is grounded in an alliance between the son and the oral mother,”¹¹⁸ and significantly governed by a desire to “exclude the father.”¹¹⁹ Masochistic practices attempt to achieve a return to the very same state of unity—what Deleuze terms a “primal delirium”¹²⁰—after which Philip, directed by his oral impulses, has been unconsciously questing. Both he and the masochist seek, essentially, to undo the Oedipus complex; to expunge identification with the castrating father, and forge a new link with the mother. Masochism, as Deleuze describes it, offers a means through which this difficult reversal might be achieved: its strategy is, quite simply, to “obliterate [the paternal] role,”¹²¹ developing a precarious and powerful fantasy world in which the father does not exist. The masochist thus engages wholeheartedly in a process of disavowal, denying the “the validity of reality,”¹²² and supplanting it instead with a scenario tailored to his own particular desires. In his carefully orchestrated universe all possibility of mutilation at the father’s hands disappears along with the figure himself. Any remaining traces of him are erased, leaving the son free to engage in an incestuous union with his oral maternal ideal, who like Rachel, has been un-castrated through fetish. In this way, masochism pares down the oedipal triangle, restoring the dyadic pre-oedipal relationship between mother

¹¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. Jean McNeil (New York: Zone Books, 1991) 67.

¹¹⁹ Deleuze, 93.

¹²⁰ Deleuze, 27.

¹²¹ Deleuze, 99.

¹²² Ronald Bogue, “Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch,” *Deleuze and Guattari* (London: Routledge, 1989) 47.

and infant son.

The all-important masochistic obliteration of the father is a twofold process, both parts of which Philip engages in enthusiastically: the castrating paternal in his capacity as superego, omnipresent regulator of forbidden desire, must be disarmed and expelled; and then his image, inscribed on the son through genital identification in the oedipal period, must be expunged. In consequence, the father figure and all traces of his existence are eliminated, and the way back to the oral realm lies cleared before the masochist. The first part of this destructive ritual, to which I shall return in greater detail, is effected through “projecting the superego onto the...woman.”¹²³ The masochist endows his maternal ideal with the “repressive authority which regulates his sexuality,” thus stripping the father of his castrating threat, and placing it instead in the hands of the mother.¹²⁴ In this way she usurps the paternal place and his power, and he is effectively disarmed and ousted from the triangle.

Invested with authority to match the father’s, the mother can now effectively undo what he, wielding the threat of dismemberment, has achieved in the oedipal phase, and erase his image imprinted on the son. This is the function of the masochistic beating: to eradicate and purge from the son his identification with the paternal:

[In masochism] where is the father hidden? Could it not be in the person being beaten? The masochist...asks to be beaten, he expiates but why and for what crime? Is it not precisely the father image in him that is thus miniaturised, beaten...and humiliated? What the subject atones for is his resemblance to the father, and the father’s likeness in him.¹²⁵

It is of no small significance that the ruptures in the maternal presence which characterise Philip’s early life are, according to him, products of paternal interference. He believes his father indirectly caused his mother’s death by dying himself (she was too “young and delicate” [113] to survive without him), and we are expressly told that his nurse was banished by Ambrose. Philip reveals his primordial understanding of the father as disruptive and dangerous, responsible for the disappearance of the early maternal. He functions, thus, like the oedipal castrator, whose purpose is similarly to break up the elemental dyad and destroy the abundant pre-oedipal mother. She vanishes as soon as she is dismembered, to be replaced instead by her disfigured oedipal counterpart, whose conspicuous lack is testimony to paternal brutality. It is through this violent removal of the maternal phallus that the father

¹²³ Deleuze, 124.

¹²⁴ Deleuze, 130.

¹²⁵ Deleuze, 61.

forces the son, on pain of a similar mutilation, to take him as an object of identification, and to abandon his wounded mother. Thus his image, etched into the masochist, forever recalls the threat of castration under which phallic identification was effected. It is precisely this father, and his oedipal legacy reflected in the son, which masochism seeks to erase. The oral mother returns, Deleuze argues, called up by the masochistic subject who, through fetishistic disavowal, “transfers to [her] the possession...of the phallus.”¹²⁶ Empowered and whole once more, she chastises the father-image ingrained in the son until it vanishes, taking with it all traces of a paternal threat, and leaving him free to act on his primal incestuous impulses.

In this light it becomes clear that Philip’s increasing desire to have Rachel rid him of his property reveals more than just his shifting allegiances. It indicates too the masochistic yearning to be “punished” as Deleuze describes it, with a view to reverse oedipal outcomes. Philip’s identification with Ambrose is, as we have seen, a connection he initially cherishes, and significantly one that is bound up with ownership of the property. I have suggested that the title “*heir*”, usually reserved for immediate descendents, has situated him in the position of surrogate son, and so casts Ambrose as a paternal figure. It similarly ensures that a process of identification, akin to the oedipal boy’s longing to resemble his father, takes place. Stepping into his cousin’s position at the head of the estate becomes, “the whole object of [Philip’s] life”: as inheritor, he literally is “trained” (22) to be like his cousin. A shared investment in the land is thus not only fundamentally responsible for the filial nature of Philip’s relationship with his cousin, but also explicitly enacts an identification with the paternal figure that echoes the oedipal pattern. In this sense, Philip’s desire to *lose* the property and his inherited status as “a landowner” (11) becomes an attempt to eliminate the father-son connection with his cousin, and erase the identity between them which betrays its existence. Like the masochistic subject who longs to purge, through castigation, phallic vestiges of the paternal in himself, Philip plans to *sacrifice* “Mr Ashley,” Ambrose’s legacy, in order to become “Master Philip” once more.

It is significant that Rachel expressly attributes the necessity that she leave Philip and the Ashley estate to the fact that he now owns the estate.

The time has come for me to go. It would have been quite otherwise, had the house been mine, and you...in my employ. I should be Mrs Ashley...But now, as it has turned out, you are Philip Ashley, and I, a woman relative, living on your bounty. (213)

¹²⁶ Deleuze, 127.

It is clear that in order to maintain a connection to the oral maternal—in order to persuade Rachel to stay with him—Philip, like the masochist, must be rid of his paternal legacy, which in his case, is embedded in the land. The process by which he plans to dispossess himself is inflected with eager anticipation, and in this way constitutes a longing for punishment that can only be described as masochistic. Philip decides with great excitement legally to abandon his entire inheritance, and so ensures that those circumstances he feared most upon learning of Ambrose's marriage will indeed come into effect. The document he draws up guarantees he will lose all of his land, and consequently be "put out of [his] home and pensioned like a servant"(22)—a scenario he specifically contemplated with "sadness" and "sick...uncertainty" (22) prior to Rachel's arrival. Now, however, he considers the dreary prospect of living in the lodge, "call[ing] upon her for orders", and "wait[ing] on her bidding, cap in hand" with barely contained elation (220). He keenly awaits a life of servility, in which he will become "another Seecombe" (262), and which was once utterly abhorrent to him. That which Philip has previously *explicitly* considered unbearable punishment becomes desirable because, like the masochistic beating, it expunges his filial relationship with Ambrose. Losing his inheritance, Philip will be stripped of the special bond with his cousin, founded on the bequest of property, which previously linked the two together as father and son. Upon agreeing to the arrangement, Rachel will possess the estate, and Ambrose and Philip will revert to being simply cousins, unconnected by the title "heir." "Mr Ashley" will be wiped out, leaving only "Master Philip" behind. Thus, like Deleuze's maternal ideal, Rachel functions to erase, by means of chastisement, the image of the paternal imprinted on the son so that a pre-oedipal state might be restored. Philip foresees his dispossession as resulting in precisely this dyadic condition. "Rachel and I" he muses to himself, "living within [our]selves...the world outside our doors passing unheeded. Day after day, night after night, as long as we both shall live" (255).

Deleuze proposes that core to the success of the counter-oedipal project is the drawing up of some kind of formal agreement. In his own words, "masochism cannot do without a contract."¹²⁷ This arrangement is "established between hero and woman," and basically ensures that "at a precise point in time and for a determinate period she is given every right over him."¹²⁸ The document Philip drafts, the details of which I have briefly discussed, effectively makes him Rachel's servant from the day of his twenty-fifth birthday until that of

¹²⁷ Deleuze, 75.

¹²⁸ Deleuze, 65.

her death. As such it conforms precisely to the masochistic model, both in terms of its stipulations, and, more importantly, its *structure*: Deleuze's contract and Philip's are both agreements made between son and oral mother. Forged thus, the arrangement functions to shift all of the power and authority which become associated with the father in the oedipal phase (by virtue of his power to castrate) onto the figure of the oral mother. She usurps his position, and exiles him as a result. Deleuze explains this process as follows:

In the contractual relationship, the woman typically figures as an object in the patriarchal system. The contract in masochism reverses this state of affairs by making the woman into the party with whom it is entered into.... This extreme form...excludes the father and displaces onto the mother the task of exercising the paternal law.¹²⁹

The very act of entering into the arrangement *with* the maternal defuses paternal supremacy and serves the masochistic purpose. As contractor herself, the mother plays a conventionally masculine role that would more usually be taken up by the father. Instated thus, she acquires the authoritative function that his position entails, and simultaneously ensures there is no place for him in the agreement. In this way, the masochistic contract primarily serves to oust the father from the family triangle, and also to invest the mother with power to equal his, without which she would not be able to effect the elimination of oedipal identification in the way we have seen. It is only through the agreement that she gains the authority to undo what he has done, and, significantly, only through the agreement that he is banished.

Thus it is vital that, prior to achieving incestuous union with the oral mother, the masochist has successfully entered into a contract with her. If the agreement is not in place, then the family remains triangular: the father is not exiled and thus continues to constitute a retributive, castrating threat. Philip's union with Rachel significantly takes place hours *before* he has presented her with the redrafted copy of Ambrose's will, and as such appears to be carried out at the risk of mutilation. This, however, is not the case. Their sexual encounter takes place under the auspices of another contract: Philip believes that he has asked Rachel to be his wife, and that she has agreed. "I wonder if any man had been accepted in marriage in quite so straight a fashion", he says, musing the next morning over their night together (253). Thus he has sex with her, imagining that he has made the necessary agreement with the oral mother, and has excluded the castrating paternal figure in the way we have seen.

Significantly, Rachel's *hand*, which fetish has designated her primordial phallus, is the last

¹²⁹ Deleuze, 92-3.

image Philip references before the candle is snuffed, and darkness obscures the details of their union from the reader. Fixation on this object immediately before intercourse takes place explicitly suggests that it is the un-castrated mother with whom Philip goes to bed. His attitude towards the sex act itself is similarly marked by a peculiarly *oral* quality, most evident in his observation that “a woman, accepting love, has no defence” (254). Implicit in this remark is Philip’s understanding of the male sexual advance as a kind of attack, a *destructive* act. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud writes the following: “In the oral stages of organisation of the libido, amorous possession is still one and the same as annihilation of the object.”¹³⁰ The sexual experience and the act of destroying are, for Philip and the Freudian child, identical. This is because, as we have seen, drinking from the mother’s breast is an activity fraught with sexual sensations, and also a cannibalistic process—the infant still imagines it is the maternal body itself upon which he feeds. Thus, while the child sates his hunger, all the time experiencing acute sexual pleasure, he also gradually *destroys* his mother and incorporates her into himself. At the height of gratification she ceases to exist as an object entirely, and becomes one with him instead. Annihilation is, in this sense, inextricably bound up with sexual experience. They are inseparable twin features of the same process, the aim of which is the total and blissful merging of mother with son.

Philip’s post-coital musings suggest that intercourse with Rachel has produced precisely this kind of undifferentiated condition. Significantly she is absent from these passages, as if she has indeed been destroyed in their union, and only Philip remains in a state of satiated fullness.

I went indoors up to my room, and dragging a chair beside the open window, sat down in it, and looked towards the sea. My mind was empty, without thought. My body calm and still. No problems came swimming to the surface, no anxieties itched their way through from the hidden depths to ruffle the blessed peace. It was as though everything in life was now resolved.... (255)

The absence of mental activity here implies a momentary suspension of Philip’s adult subjectivity, temporarily transforming him into the pre-rational child, and his body into a body of water, deep and profoundly still. In this sense the sea, towards which he gazes, appears to flow into him, and mingle with him. Its surface becomes his surface, its depths his depths, until the two are one and the same, amorphous and undifferentiated. In this instance,

¹³⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. C.J.M. Hubback (London: International Psycho-Analytic Press, 1922) 69.

du Maurier's language quite explicitly summons the "oceanic feeling,"¹³¹ borrowing both Freud's metaphor and the sense it describes of "something limitless, unbounded."¹³² In *Civilization and its Discontents*, the "infant at the breast"¹³³ is situated at the root of all such experiences, and once more a link is discernable between Philip's experience of sexual gratification and the satiation of the oral child. Like this child who does not differentiate between himself, his mother or the flowing of her milk, Philip, in his satisfied condition, conceives of his body as indistinguishable from the vast, fluid depths and expanses of the ocean. In the aftermath of his quasi-incestuous union, he finds himself in a state of abundant and uninterrupted pleasure, the pre-oedipal circumstances after which he has been questing. It appears, thus, that the marital contract has indeed resulted in the exclusion of the castrating father, and Philip's masochistic longing for oral bliss has been successfully and safely achieved.

This, however, is not the case. Rachel has not agreed to marry Philip, and when she makes this clear to him, he is forced to recognise that the all-important contract with the oral mother does not exist.

I realised, with anguish and despair, that so it was in fact, between us both; all that had passed had been in error. She had not understood what I asked of her at midnight, nor I in my blind wonder, what she had given, therefore what I had believed to be a pledge...was something quite different, without meaning....(269)

No formal agreement is in place to exclude the father, and so Philip must accept that the dyadic state he believes he has attained has in fact been triangular all along. The paternal persists, and with him, the threat of retribution at his hands. Thus, the scene is set for what Deleuze terms "the aggressive return of the father."¹³⁴ This dramatic re-entry heralds a fissuring in the seamless unity of the oral condition as the masochist finds himself negotiating oedipal territory all over again. In the presence of the paternal figure it becomes undeniably clear that the mother does not, in actual fact, possess a penis, and so the fetish object is divested of its function, revealing in the process that horrifying absence, mark of the violent father. The abundant and gratifying oral maternal transmogrifies, in this way, into the mutilated oedipal mother, and her threatening lack opens up a gulf between her and her son.

¹³¹ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. Joan Riviere, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1973) 1.

¹³² Freud, 1.

¹³³ Freud, 4

¹³⁴ Deleuze, 65

Philip's revelation, and the time leading up to it, tracks this paternal return. Even before he is aware that his marriage contract is a sham, Ambrose's presence re-emerges in the form of the tombstone rock beneath which lies the unsent letter, leather-wrapped and cadaverous. Walking in the woods, Philip inadvertently leads Rachel to the tombstone rock, and before it, the dead man is resurrected. "She did not know as I did," Philip thinks to himself, "how often Ambrose had stood there, smiling and leaning on his stick...the slab of granite tall and proud would have taken on the substance of the man himself" (264). The stone transforms into a particularly phallic image of Philip's surrogate father, who is not only "tall" and phallus-like himself, but also (amusingly) in possession of a penis-extending stick. Next to this effigy of exaggerated manhood Rachel's lack, obscured by nothing more than fantasy, threatens to reveal itself and destroy the delusion of oral harmony in which Philip has revelled since the two became sexually intimate. Indeed, when she speaks, her words are "the words of a stranger" (264), and she seems, significantly, "not closer to [him], but more distant" (265). The virile rock-Ambrose thus intrudes on the pre-oedipal dyad, and serves an overtly oedipal function. Like the threat of castration, it creates, in Philip's own words, "a barrier between [Rachel and himself]" (264), and so anticipates the unequivocal disruption that follows from the dissolution of the fictional marriage contract. Here the fragmentation of oral unity is rendered even more explicit. As Philip learns that his proposal has been rejected, the Rachel of whom he has said "no part...was strange" disappears, to be replaced by another, very different woman with a foreign face and eyes (324). "We were strangers," he says, "with no link between us" (270). Thus, the chasm between them widens, and the dyad breaks up. In this instance, the father's presence becomes undeniable, and Ambrose actually appears. Philip sees him standing in the shadows, "under the flickering candlelight" (270), and then again in the mirror, where his own face should be. The world of masochistic fantasy, in which he has immersed himself, dissolves around him: the father is neither expelled, nor his likeness in the son expunged, and Rachel's primordial phallus begins to disintegrate, revealing as it does a violent absence: "The hand I held was warm no longer," Philip tells us, distressed, "Cold and brittle, the fingers struggled for release, and the rings scratched, cutting at my palm. I let it go, and as I did so wanted it again" (270). The fetish object, which previously functioned to draw Philip towards Rachel by creating her as the un-castrated oral mother, now serves to push him away. The warmth it lacks signals the loss of the originary embrace, and its new "cold," and "cutting" qualities connote both death and a slicing, which together imply dismemberment. The maternal phallus becomes, in this way, a corpse-organ, detached and lifeless, and its brittleness implies both a kind of rigor mortis, and perhaps also the general

fragility of the penis itself. It is for this reason that Philip, having released his grip, immediately longs to possess the hand once more. He remains unwilling to accept the absence with which he is confronted, and which will force him to abandon the oral dyad wherein the mother lacks nothing, and castration does not exist. His solution to the quandary in which he finds himself is, significantly, a desperate, *destructive* act. "I placed my hands about her throat, encircling it," Philip tells us, "'Never leave me,' I said, 'swear it, never, never.' She tried to move her lips in answer, but could not do so, because of the pressure of my hands" (271). Philip's oral impulses, which see obliteration of the object as inseparable from the sexual experience, and a pre-requisite for union, urge him towards violence in this instance. With his hands about Rachel's throat, he feverishly attempts to re-achieve, by means of annihilation, that bonding which the sex act has previously accomplished. Just as the language of combat, in which Philip describes that intimate scenario, betrays his infantile equation of sexual gratification with destruction, so this violent episode recalls his incestuous union with Rachel: his aggressive demand that she "Never leave [him]" clearly echoes that post-coital fantasy in which he imagines he has secured her presence "forever and ever" (255). Thus, both annihilation and sexual interaction appear, for Philip, to tend towards the same blissful end, and in this light, his ultimate, murderous deed becomes a final attempt to achieve the unified dyad with his oral ideal.

The bell rang out from the clock-tower on the house. It went on and on, and the day being still and calm, it travelled across the field, down to the sea....I climbed down to where she lay...I took her hands and held them. They were cold. 'Rachel,' I said to her, and 'Rachel' once again...louder still came the sound of the clanging bell. She opened her eyes and looked at me. At first, I think in pain. Then in bewilderment. Then finally, so I thought, in recognition. Yet I was in error, even then. She called me Ambrose. I went on holding her hand until she died. (335)

The clanging bell, chimes of death, an impromptu funereal knell, sounds the demise both of du Maurier's narrative and its eponymous heroine. It connects the sea, in terms of which Philip has described his ultimate experience of union with Rachel, to the site of her dying body, explicitly indicating his oral intentions. A kind of phonic pathway is created, leading from the destruction of the mother, to the flowing dissolution that the ocean represents. From the moment Philip takes hold of Rachel's hands, however, it becomes clear that this primal continuity is not available to him. The coldness of her fingers signals here, as it did during that second disastrous marriage proposal, that the fetish object has been divested of its phallic significance. The mother is castrated, and thus not pre-oedipal and abundant. Philip's destructive act has been unsuccessful. He has not returned to a state of dyadic union,

uninterrupted by any trace of the father, a fact Rachel confirms when she calls him “Ambrose”.

Baudrillard writes that “No one has ever been dispossessed of the power associated with seduction,”¹³⁵ and this is fundamentally true of Rachel. Even after her death she continues to shimmer and flicker such that Philip, tormented, asks “Shall I be free...one day?”(4).

None will ever guess the burden of blame I carry on my shoulders; nor will they know that everyday, haunted still by doubt, I ask myself a question which I cannot answer. Was Rachel innocent or guilty? (4)

In the narrative’s opening stages, Philip remains powerless to name Rachel murderess or victim. As a result she persists, kept alive by his uncertainty, and proves of the seductress that “her ultimate trap is to ask: tell me who I am.”¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Baudrillard, 88.

¹³⁶ Baudrillard, 87.

Conclusion

On setting out to write her biography of Daphne du Maurier, Margaret Forster was warned by the author's children that she would find their mother something of a "chameleon,"¹³⁷ in possession of an uncanny ability to appear as different things to different people. This opinion Forster finds repeated time and again in her research, emphasised by friends and family throughout du Maurier's life. "She liked to make each [acquaintance] feel especially favoured," the biographer concludes, "She gave people what she thought they wanted."¹³⁸ This protean tendency to shift from identity to identity, forming and reforming herself to suit her surrounding company, was a source of deep unease for the author, who, in a letter to Ellen Doubleday, writes that she feels "[her] life has been one long lie as far back as [she] can remember."¹³⁹ Forster explains the sense of fear by which this realisation is accompanied as an anxiety over impending "schizophreni[a]."¹⁴⁰ a final, terrifying inability to separate out the lies, or fantasy Daphnes, from what she imagined to be her more authentic, private identity: an elusive entity, unavailable to outside spectators and summarised memorably by the author as the "person who dances alone in the long room, thumbing her nose at the world."¹⁴¹ This sense of anxiety over the self and its precarious nature is communicated in her fiction. In each of the novels at which I have looked, characters are invariably under threat of losing themselves, of slipping forever into a skin that is not their own. In *Jamaica Inn*, Mary finds herself in constant danger of transforming into her Aunt Patience, emblem of cowering, servile femaleness. In *Rebecca* the heroine so nearly becomes a facsimile of her fearsome predecessor, and Philip spends his time, in *My Cousin Rachel*, engaged in futile attempts to separate himself from Ambrose so he might safely take possession of his widow, all the while replicating, with more and more precision, the behaviour of his dead father figure. It is from this pervasive threat of transformation and annihilation that the narratives derive their Gothicism, which consists, as both Jerrold Hogle and Eugenia Delamotte have suggested, chiefly in the disruption of the boundaries of identity. Each of the dissolving agents I have discussed is, after all, something of a monster: Rebecca, gorgonesque, is a mutant snake woman, the Vicar a pallid, psychopathic hermaphrodite and Rachel, so alarmingly elusive, a

¹³⁷ Margaret Forster, *Daphne du Maurier*. (London: Arrow, 1994) 417.

¹³⁸ Forster, 417.

¹³⁹ Daphne du Maurier, letter to Ellen Doubleday, 1947 quoted in Forster, 224.

¹⁴⁰ Forster, 417.

¹⁴¹ Daphne du Maurier, letter to Ellen Doubleday, 1947 quoted in Forster, 224.

potential black widow. This fear of engulfment, insidious and terrifying within the covers of her books, evolves out of du Maurier's own life, which in some lights seems a string of different parts to be played, none of them quite matching the author's own idea of herself, and all of them threatening on occasion to eclipse it entirely. This private Daphne—the self du Maurier has termed both “disembodied spirit” and more frequently “the-boy-in-the-box”—is too profoundly complex and ambiguous to fit neatly within the bounds of conventional identity, and hence the source of her life of “lies.”

The indefinable du Maurier—the “half-breed”¹⁴² few people were permitted to witness—is also, significantly, connected with the author's creative process. Using the Jungian notion that character comprises dual personalities, selves No.1 and No. 2 (which du Maurier designates box and boy respectively), she explains, in a letter to her teenage daughter that “[No.2] certainly has a lot to do with [her] writing.”¹⁴³ Indeed Forster goes so far as to suggest that “without No.2, that boy-in-the-box, there would have been nothing.”¹⁴⁴ Du Maurier's fiction is, on this account, a product of her struggle with a deep and irreconcilable multiplicity of self, an opinion bolstered by the author's own description of her work as a means to “write out the many problems” in her life.¹⁴⁵ Significantly, the “problems” to which she refers here are precisely those presented by the “boy-in-the-box”; among them, her inexorable pull towards female love objects—a tendency she believed proved her masculine character—and her relationship with her father, with whom, we should remember, her boyishness is originally connected. Sexuality, gender and incest: the interwoven trinity of issues by which her identity was haunted becomes the trinity by which so many of her narratives are informed. There is, it seems, a cathartic purpose to her work: her fiction is a secure world in which the deepest discomforts may be expressed and explored, and inner conflicts, externalised and examined. Thus, like the strange distorted versions of themselves before which she sets each of the protagonists dealt with here, du Maurier's narratives are, to some extent, her own dark mirror.

An autobiographical reading, however, by no means exhausts the possibilities of her narrative. I have used psychoanalytic theory together with close textual analysis, taking into account the author's lucid prose, masterful plotting, and manipulation of genre, to suggest

¹⁴² Forster, 222.

¹⁴³ Daphne du Maurier, letter to Flavia Browning, 1954 quoted in Forster, 276.

¹⁴⁴ Forster, 417.

¹⁴⁵ Daphne du Maurier, letter to Maureen Baker-Munton, 1957 quoted in Forster, 422.

that du Maurier's personal concerns interconnect, in the world of her fiction, to form complex structuring patterns. In *Jamaica Inn*, Kristeva's abjection thesis crystallises Mary's difficult confrontation with confining borders—specifically those defining gender identity—and illuminates the archaic roots of her perilous quest to overstep and destabilise them. In *Rebecca*, Nancy Chodorow's conception of the Oedipus complex reveals a family triangle, in which the heroine, whose sexuality becomes ambivalent, vacillates between paternal and maternal love objects. And finally, in *My Cousin Rachel*, Gilles Deleuze's account of masochism elucidates Philip's regressive journey back through oedipal territory to a dyadic state of incestuous unity with the mother. Thus, du Maurier's preoccupations do not simply crop up in her work as fictionalised excerpts from her own life. Rather they interact and intersect to varying extents, in each of the three novels, forming frameworks over which the fabric of narrative is woven.

In this thesis, I have detailed the peculiarities of these informing structures; however, the constellation of interests from which each pattern derives is not exclusive to *Jamaica Inn*, *Rebecca* and *My Cousin Rachel*. Rather du Maurier's identity demons—incest, gender, sexuality—emerge repeatedly throughout her long career, appearing in different guises, their presence suggesting, as in the narratives examined here, a concern with the precarious nature of self. Femaleness, for example, comes under scrutiny in the 1942 romance *Frenchman's Creek*—the book by which, Auerbach writes, du Maurier was “most embarrassed.”¹⁴⁶ Dona St Columb's flight from the artificiality of her oppressive gender role loosely resembles Mary's dangerous attempts to extricate herself from her uncle's savage hierarchy. However, the later narrative, an escapist text defined chiefly by a sense of wish-fulfilment, rewrites Mary's nightmare as dream, in which the heroine is given license to dress and behave like a boy without any of the retribution doled out in *Jamaica Inn*. Similarly, the animalism by which Joss Merlyn is characterised, and which exposes the violence behind the laws constraining identity, resurfaces in “The Blue Lenses.” This short story, published in *The Breaking Point* in 1959, describes the plight of a woman, Marda West, who, after eye surgery, finds that her prosthetic implants reveal the animal faces of people she meets, and thus expose what Auerbach has termed “the predation within the pieties”¹⁴⁷ of human society. So too, the author's interest in homosexual attraction, dimly visible in *Rebecca* as the

¹⁴⁶Nina Auerbach, *Daphne du Maurier: Haunted Heiress* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000) 104.

¹⁴⁷ Auerbach, 120.

heroine's growing infatuation with her predecessor, emerges once more in "Ganymede," a short story about an aging academic who falls in love with a young Venetian boy. Incidentally, "Venetian," in du Maurier's personal code language meant "lesbian" and the intense relationship between teacher and adolescent recalls her own bond with Ferdy, a "Venetian" instructor from her French finishing school and the first of her female obsessions.¹⁴⁸ The father-daughter romance which, I have suggested, shapes *Rebecca*, surfaces time and again, presented and represented in different lights. In *The Progress of Julius*, for example, first published in 1933, the author creates the eponymous protagonist as a powerfully possessive father, obsessed with his daughter to the extent that he kills her when she suggests she has found love in the arms of another man. Her 1971 short story "A Borderline Case," reworks the same relationship, but reverses it (and omits the death). Shelagh Money, a confident young actress, becomes besotted and has sex with Nick Barry—a man she later finds out is her father. Finally, echoes of Philip's incestuous yearning for the maternal embrace, by which *My Cousin Rachel* is structured, are visible in du Maurier's short story "The Menace," also published in *The Breaking Point*. Here the author creates an aging but infantile film star, wealthy and surrounded by people who work for him, but whose only real interest is Pinkie, a nurturing, motherly figure from his childhood.

It is arguably in her capacity to be at once subversive and popular that du Maurier's genius chiefly lies. Her fiction both probes relentlessly at deeply entrenched cultural values, and speaks, as her enormous commercial success suggests, to the vast reading public. The three novels analysed here, each structured by the interlinking issues of incest, gender transgression and female sexuality, are among the most enduringly celebrated and widely read of du Maurier's narratives. Each was, in its time, acclaimed for its far-reaching appeal, and branded either a romance or a rollicking adventure story: critics deemed *Jamaica Inn* "jolly good fun,"¹⁴⁹ Victor Gollancz sold *Rebecca* as "an exquisite love story,"¹⁵⁰ and *My Cousin Rachel*, admittedly recognised as a "consummate piece of story-telling"¹⁵¹ was more usually commended for its enormous popularity and admiringly termed a "bestseller."¹⁵² It is, it may be argued, du Maurier's considerable narrative skill on which her broad and persistent appeal primarily rests. A mistress of suspense, her complex plotting ensures the reader remains

¹⁴⁸ Forster, 28.

¹⁴⁹ Forster, 122.

¹⁵⁰ Forster, 136.

¹⁵¹ Forster, 256.

¹⁵² Forster, 254.

gripped, as in a steel web, until climax and resolution release them. In addition, she possesses a keen ability accurately to describe familiar human experiences—of jealousy, for example, frustration and fear—and thus irresistibly invites identification with her characters. There is invariably also, in du Maurier's fiction, a delicious, indefinable frisson—labelled by critics “an atmosphere of terror”¹⁵³—which thrills and fascinates, and is testament to the darker obsessions lingering, like Northrop Frye's “primitive vision,”¹⁵⁴ beneath the familiar novelistic details and elaborate plotlines. Indistinct at first, analysis discovers these private anxieties as both the source of nameless menace and the skeletal structures of the texts so that the piratical “fun” of *Jamaica Inn* gives way to a savage delineation of gender brutality, characterised by the ever-present threats of rape and murder; *Rebecca*'s “exquisite love story” reveals the dream of incest, and a latent, female bisexuality; and finally *My Cousin Rachel* draws a withering picture of masculinity, and exposes an infantile and masochistic longing for the body of the mother. In each of these narratives the author showcases her capacity to create glittering, publicly-acclaimed fiction that is equally shadowy, disruptive and transgressive, and thus like the heroine of her most famous novel, who dreamily covers page after page with the strange barbed scrawl of her sinister predecessor, Daphne du Maurier, it has become clear, writes with a double-edged pen.

¹⁵³ Forster, 138.

¹⁵⁴ Northrop Frye, “The Koine of Myth: Myth as a Universally Intelligible Language” in *Myth and Metaphor*, ed. Robert D. Denham (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1991)10.

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